

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Case Former CD      | 2   |
| CF Copyright Notice | 3   |
| CF v1 #1            | 4   |
| CF v1 #2            | 13  |
| CF v1 #3            | 20  |
| CF v2 #1            | 33  |
| CF v2 #2            | 42  |
| CF v2 #3            | 59  |
| CF v3 #1            | 76  |
| CF v3 #2            | 93  |
| CF v3 #3            | 110 |
| CF v4 #1            | 135 |
| CF v4 #2            | 156 |

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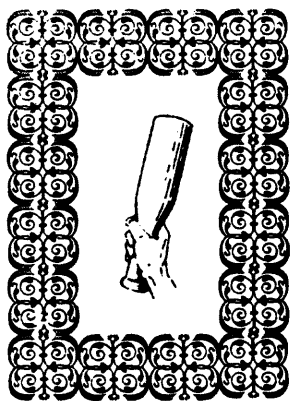
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The Society For the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny.



# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

"Magna est Veritas et praevalerebit." – I. Esdras, iiij: 41.

VOL. I

APRIL, 1991

NO. 1.

## FAMA ET CONFESSIO FRATERNITATIS

*Die Strahlen der Sonnen  
vertreiben die Nacht,  
zernichten der Heuchlers  
erschlichene Macht.*

–E. SCHICKANEDER

Last July, at the apex of that frenzied time of the season when the Fourth, Lower Hay Lake and preparations for the convention all seem to run together into some congealed mass of pyrotechnic overkill, something arrived in my mailbox that I actually noticed. It was just a foldover mailing, innocent enough for all appearances, but it bore a LaCrosse postmark, and it had been sent by the "Friends of the PGI," so it deserved a better fate than simply to be cast onto the ever growing pile of ads, bills and other crap that accumulates on my coffee table every summer until after Labor Day.

Now we all received one of these pieces of propaganda, so I don't have to elaborate on its contents, and we all recall who sent it, so I needn't name any names. I know that I wasn't alone in my feelings of shock, disgust and outrage upon perusal of this prime example of a horse turd. It was not so much the mailing itself, but more that it seemed to be the culmination of a wave of strange goings-on within the PGI-political meddlings, attacks on fireworks tradition, goofy safety restrictions and myriad other gusts of some ill wind that had been blowing for the last couple of years.

The usual pre-convention excitement was dampened by anxiety and fear, and I soon discovered that I was not the only Guild member with some awful questions looming in my mind:

- What would happen if the bogus straw poll presented by the "Friends" obtained the results they were looking for?
- Were there more of them than there were of us?
- Did this mean the end of *Pyrotechnica* and the death of the autonomy of our local clubs?

- Was our beloved Guild undergoing some horrible metamorphosis into a society of politically ambitious addlebrates, safety fakers, fuse lighters, UFO chasers and dipshits who value their own egos more than fireworks?
- Where would we fit into such an organization?
- Would the convention become a gathering of self aggrandizing sandal wearers in approved safety goggles and flak jackets lighting cheap class C for an entire week?

Thank God, our fears were unfounded. The convention saw the Guild's elected officers steer us out of harm's way and proved that the general membership possessed great confidence in their abilities. But the question remained, how long would this stable situation last?

Out of the summer's maelstrom of anxiety and confusion, the seed of an idea was born - partly out of the necessity for a contingency plan should the PGI suffer the fate of old paste and go sour, partly out of mischievous sense of adventure fueled by countless bottles of the fine product of the August Schell Brewing Company. Those of us who banded together for fellowship, unity and the display of true skill in Pyrotechny needed somewhere to turn, some sort of loosely structured organization without dues, without serious rules, without political aspirations, and open only to those who could get along together for the purpose of furthering the cause of pyrotechny, out of a demonstrated love of fireworks, freedom and all that it could represent. Thus was conceived the "Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny," better known to its members as the I.O.O.J. The Auburn convention saw the first manifestation of its existence, and the initiation of its first members.

It is a unique honor to be inducted into our number. You have been chosen for membership because you represent what is best in the world of fireworks, and because your opinions, ideas and companionship are valuable to others of a like mind. While we implicitly trust your judgement and do not intend to impose restrictions on your behavior, please use common sense to guide your conduct.



The I.O.O.J. is certainly not for everyone, and there is no need to even mention its existence to anyone who is not a member. Please stand by your fellow adherents to our obligation and always work to defend the traditional principles of pyrotechny.

The future looks quite rosy for our order – membership has been growing steadily since the convention, and a number of activities are in the offing for the 1991 convention in LaCrosse. Count on target practice and probably a party on Saturday after the convention proper is over. The Public Display for 1991 promises to be phenomenal, with many contributions from our members. I am confident that I speak for all of us when I say that I look forward to gathering in LaCrosse. May Vulcan smile down on us all!

BIANCO GASOLINI

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## ON THE FORCED DRYING OF PYROTECHNIC DEVICES

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*

—VIRGIL

No truly accomplished pyrotechnist is without patience. Indeed, the masters I have observed at work are patient and meticulous almost beyond reason – ramming countless spolettes, stringing and pasting innumerable pupadelles, all to be consumed in a few brilliant moments. To this, add the fact that all stars and components of artifices which are pasted need to dry thoroughly, and it is apparent that pyrotechny is hardly an endeavor of instant gratification.

The drying process may be speeded somewhat, of course, by an increase in heat, decrease in humidity, and increase of circulation of the surrounding air. Yet there are limits to the degree to which these conditions may be safely enhanced, as I discovered one June day over twenty years ago.

On that day, my lifelong friend and colleague, Stephano Flowarti and I were engaged in the construction of about a dozen marvelous yet lamentably obsolete devices known as cherrybombs. At that time, a company named Caseco sold the cardboard casing halves, along with the chemicals for flashpowder, 3/32" underwater fuse, and booklets for the construction of cherrybombs and myriad other infernal devices. All by mail, all without questions or need of a license – a blast from the past.

Ideally, the casing halves would be filled with the surprisingly virulent flashpowder we concocted by using three parts potassium perchlorate, two parts bright aluminum (600 mesh), and one part sulfur – measured by volume, usually with the kitchen's measuring cups and spoons. To assure intimacy of mixture, we ground the flash powder in a porcelain

mortar and pestle; a practice I eventually came to grief from, but that's another story. Once filled and glued together, a hole was punched in the sphere and a length of 3/32" Visco type fuse was inserted. The cherrybomb was then dipped in Elmer's glue, dunked in a mixture of Elmer's and sawdust, and allowed to dry. To make them aesthetically complete, we spray-painted them red.

Fine and well, except that they took their sweet time drying, and didn't work optimally otherwise. Unfortunately, (and many I.O.O.J. members will surely sympathize) sometimes the uplifting of the spirit and brightening of the day that can only be brought about by a neighborhood-rocking explosion simply cannot wait for drying time.

On that day in June, our prescription for the doldrums was a batch of cherrybombs. The immediacy of our need to blow something up led to our fateful decision to dry our wares in Mrs. Flowarti's oven. We reasoned that on a "warm" setting, we could increase temperature. So into the oven, atop a cookie sheet, went roughly a baker's dozen of cherrybombs. We looked in on them through the window often, anxiously at first, but after a time, (half an hour, an hour, who knows) we gained confidence that our reasoning and method was sound, brushing aside our concerns over the observations that those fuses certainly seemed a much darker green and had lost their shininess.

After ignoring the cherrybombs for a time, comfortable with their quiescence, Stephano warned that his mother would soon be home, and while Mrs. Flowarti was and is a kind and tolerant lady, we saw no reason to test those fine qualities. It just wouldn't have done to have had her glance into the oven to see our work like that. She was already becoming annoyed with the way seemingly everything in the house, especially the kitchen utensils, were turning silver, and with our noisy experiments in general, not to mention the attentions of Officer Maccini due to them.

And so, as Mrs. Flowarti drove into the driveway, we opened the oven door. In retrospect, we should have known we were doomed as we entered the kitchen, with its smell of scorched paper, but as it was, we watched with ghastly astonishment as all the fuses lit in unison. We glanced at each other with mirrored expressions of pop-eyed, gape-jawed, disbelieving terror, in the the best traditions of Wiley Coyote. Stephano slammed the oven door and we sprinted for the back porch door. As we cleared it, which was just about the time Mrs. Flowarti approached the front door, the oven blew. It was a colossal roar that came from the kitchen. It wasn't the usual joyous concussion, but the bellow of big, big trouble, followed by the crashing dismemberment of the oven door. We ran through the back yard and into the tall woods atop the rocky hill behind Stephano's house, chests heaving.

Moments later, we heard Mrs. Flowarti shrieking Stephano's name, along with several highly uncharacteristic expletives. We understood that we were hopelessly, irrevocably, abysmally screwed, and so we shambled out of the woods, shoulders hunched, heads low, only to see Mrs. Flowarti emerge from the roiling cloud of white smoke that billowed from the porch door and kitchen windows.

It could have been worse; no police or fire department, and thanks to the warm day and open windows, no broken glass. But then again, no more even, thus no more allowance. The oven looked more like a pillow than the flat-walled box it had been, and its splintered wooden framework required much attention. It never really looked the same.

Mrs. Flowarti was never the same either. Two decades later, as we recounted misadventurous tales from our upbringings with her, we still couldn't raise more than a bitter ghost of a smile from her on that one.

Stephano and I have speculated endlessly over the mysterious physical and chemical mechanics of the incident. It seems evident that the lacquer-covered fuses, their ends somewhat frayed, had reached a kindling temperature lower than that of their black powder cores, requiring only the oxygen provided by the door opening to bring them to life.

Another puzzle is the mass-detonation of our cherrybombs. Although we have no way of confirming this, save the chilling prospect of repeating the experiment, it sounded as though there was but a single blast. There should have been a brief staccato of smaller explosions, since we cut our fuses with scissors, measured by eyeball. One possible explanation is that explosive and pyrotechnic compositions increase in sensitivity as their temperatures approach their reaction thresholds, and thusly we may have baked our cherrybombs to a horrifyingly high value of sensitivity, the first to explode detonating the batch in full.

As for us, Stephano and I have continued to exhibit all the symptoms of terminal pyrotosis. Yes, they took our chemicals and supplies away, but we acquired more. And yes, I blew myself up and spent two weeks in the hospital, but we all know that after being thrown from the horse, the best remedy is to get right back on...and so I did. Our knowledge grew as we did, likewise the magnitudes of our explosions. Newspaper articles, along with investigations of our efforts at some frightening levels, have reduced our activities considerably, though not entirely.

Still, all these years later, the stark nightmare image of all those fuses lighting simultaneously remains forever, indelibly scored upon my memory. No doubt my arrival at the Gates of Hell will be saluted by the apparition of an oven full of cherrybombs.

EDUARDO TELLERINI

## FLAMING JUSTICE

*Jus est ars boni et aequi.*

—JUSTINIAN

*My purpose all-sublime,  
I shall achieve in time,  
is to make the punishment fit the crime,  
the punishment fit the crime.*

—W. S. GILBERT

The recent emphasis on the "War on Drugs" prompts my recollection of an incident a few years ago, illustrating the possible application of pyrotechnics to this social crusade. I recount it here with great hope that it might inspire others to take similar action.

A close friend of mine was, at the time, a security guard in an apartment complex in a rather run-down section of one of the mid-South's rather run-down major cities. For the purpose of this story, we'll call him Mike (his real name). There lived in this complex a negress of mammoth proportion. Being white, and somewhat of an authority figure, Mike was a natural target for the constant verbal abuse of the obese she-gorilla. After several weeks of continuous harassment, Mike took note that the aroma of marijuana was one of the more prominent smells always emanating from "Aunt Jemima."

Being a man of good humor, and possessing a knowledge of the practical aspects of pyrotechnic materials, it occurred to Mike that he could extract a bit of revenge and at the same time strike a blow against drug abuse. With a broad smile and the drive of a man possessed, Mike simply fashioned a bogus joint out of two strands of heavy, dusted, black match, and a common cigarette paper. The loaded "joint" was then left where his tormentor was sure to find it. She soon did find it, and thinking it was heaven-sent, returned back into the squalor of her own creation to enjoy her new-found good fortune. POOF! — flaming justice — with the result that madame went on such a murderous, screaming tirade that Mike was called in to investigate and fill out a report. This he did while fighting a losing battle not to appear amused!

In his own words, "you wouldn't think those big old liver lips could get any fatter, but they did!" It took several weeks for the severe second and third-degree burns to heal — very quiet, pleasant weeks for Mike. Eventually the verbal assault resumed, but Mike would just politely smile and walk away, knowing he truly had enjoyed the last laugh.

SBIRO DA PULIZIA

## CHLORATES AND SULPHUR – MENACE OR BUGBEAR?

Conservative, *n.* *A statesman who is enamoured of existing evils, as opposed to the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.*

–AMBROSE BIERCE

*And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said,*

Stick to the devil you know.

–RUDYARD KIPLING

The instability of mixtures of chlorates with sulphur, sulphides, or sulphates is widely feared by pyrotechnists. The experience giving rise to this fear commenced almost immediately after the first synthesis of potassium chlorate by Comte Claude-Louis Berthollet in 1786. The vigorous oxidizing capability of this compound was quickly discovered, and by 1788 the attempt had been made to substitute it for saltpetre in the manufacture of gunpowder. Experiments showed the chlorate gunpowder (variously reported to contain four, six, or seven parts of potassium chlorate to one part each of sulphur and charcoal) had superior explosive and propellant characteristics compared to conventional black powder. It was in that year that an horrendous accident took place at the French government powder mill at Essonne, taking six lives including those of the mill superintendent and his daughter. The powder was being prepared by stamp milling, then in use for all powder in France. What is remarkable about this occurrence, in view of current pronouncements upon chlorate/sulphur mixtures, is that the accident did not happen at once as stamping began. Several previous batches had been made without incident, and on the day of the explosion, milling had started before breakfast; the observers had left the site to take their meal, and returned to the mill, whereupon it exploded. Recognizing the demonstrable sensitivity of chlorate/sulphur mixtures to friction and shock, it is a point necessary to bear in mind that eighteenth-century stamp mills often exploded whilst preparing ordinary black powder.

The Essonne disaster is said by Brock and others to have dampened, for a time, the interest in potassium chlorate as an oxidizer in pyrotechnic compositions. However, the sensitivity to shock and friction of such mixtures was first exploited by Alexander Forsyth (1807) for the percussion priming of firearms, followed by variations on the theme such as those of Manton, Westley Richards, and Pauly. John Walker (1826) produced the first strike-anywhere matches. The first chlorate color formulæ were published by Ure (1821), showing sulphur as the principal fuel. As the use of such mixtures spread, accidents began to happen.

Nineteenth-century records are replete with accounts of spontaneous combustion of chlorate/sulphur

mixtures. F.M. Chertier, in his first book published in 1836, recounts the spontaneous combustion of a mixture of barium chlorate and sulphur in 1834, which nearly destroyed his house, and did destroy his notes and records, compelling him to repeat much of his research. Chertier strongly encouraged the substitution of fuels such as shellac for sulphur, in his subsequent works published in 1843 and 1854. While Websky introduced lactose, and Tessier suggested rosin and even such unusual substances as pine pollen and powdered dried beef blood, these suffered, as did shellac, the defect of high price, and the use of sulphur as a general-purpose fuel in colored flame compositions continued through the late nineteenth century. Brock describes numerous factory explosions during that period, the consequences of which were aggravated by the typical location of the factories in multi-story buildings situated in densely-populated industrial districts. It was in response to such devastating and tragic events that the British government first passed the Explosives Act of 1875, which incorporated the first “tables of distances,” now a feature of explosives regulations in most countries; and then promulgated the famous order-in-council of 1894, which has stood since that time, prohibiting the admixture of chlorates with sulphur or with certain sulphur compounds in fireworks.

The British regulation takes the extreme step of forbidding not only the described combinations, but also chlorate/sulphur “contacts” such as occur when a chlorate star is primed with a sulphur-containing meal powder, or when a Japanese-style round star contains adjacent layers of a chlorate color and a sulphur-containing streamer composition. In other countries, the regulations are different or non-existent; in the United States, chlorates are banned from any but a few sharply restricted uses in Class “C” (shop goods), but largely permitted in Class “B” (display fireworks). Even where formal restriction is absent, as in the latter case, there is a general reluctance to combine chlorates with sulphur or its compounds except in certain very specialized applications.

An informed caution is not, however, the same as an irrational fear, a “taboo,” or a bugbear. Many people, especially those who are ill-informed, display the latter rather than the former, not only with respect to chlorate/sulphur mixtures but with respect to any use of chlorates whatsoever. One of the present writer’s friends was solemnly warned by a college chemistry instructor against spilling any potassium chlorate upon his clothing, which he was assured would spontaneously burst into flame were he so to do. Regrettably, strident and overblown warnings, not far different from this one, have been heard from persons, heavily bedecked with formal credentials, posing as authorities on pyrotechny. As for mixing chlorates with sulphur, this is heresy

and witchcraft, directly related to a quick-term contract with the devil.

My purpose in this short essay is to explore *why* chlorate/sulphur mixtures have caused accidents, and how the informed pyrotechnist may, short of complete avoidance of their use, work safely. Three reasons for caution in approaching chlorate/sulphur combinations may be identified: sensitivity to shock, sensitivity to friction, and potential for spontaneous combustion. The two former may be objectively established and quantified, as indeed has been done by Shimizu. The last-named is more problematical, and deserves further examination.

Undoubtedly, spontaneous combustion, being unpredictable and hard to understand, was the hazard most feared in the late nineteenth century when the British order-in-council was promulgated, and when, if the historical record may be presumed accurate, the widespread use of chlorates with sulphur began to be abandoned in other countries even without the pressure of regulation. Pyrotechnic compositions do not explode from friction or shock when undisturbed in storage, nor even when gently handled by skilled workers. If, however, they spontaneously ignite, they can create great damage. Well before 1894, it was thought that such occurrences were traceable to acidic sulphur, and therefore, stress was laid upon avoiding the use of "flowers of sulphur," prepared by sublimation and having impurities of sulphur oxides that, in the presence of dampness, formed sulphurous and sulphuric acids. "Washed sulphur" was advocated by many nineteenth-century writers for use with chlorates. According to Domenico Antoni:

"...even sulphur in rolls or loaves can contain traces of acid, and to eliminate this totally, it is subjected, once pulverized, to a thorough washing with boiling water in which is dissolved 1% of potassium carbonate. Once cooled, this is decanted, and the sulphur washed twice with cold water. At last, the sulphur is emptied into a large cloth sack and hung up to drain and dry in the sun, or by artificial heat."

In retrospect, it is evident that the use of washed sulphur was not adequate to eliminate all problems, since ultimately the use of sulphur with chlorates was largely abandoned. Why problems with instability persisted then became a moot point as far as most pyrotechnists were concerned. It is a question that deserves attention, especially in view of the good safety record of the match industry, which routinely uses chlorate/sulphur mixtures in specifically friction-sensitive applications, and in quite large quantities. Undoubtedly the match industry is a comparatively sophisticated field as contrasted with fireworks, and its safety must in part be attributable to this. The fact remains that it is using materials deemed *in-*

*herently unsafe* by many authorities, whose judgment has been enshrined in legislation governing the fireworks industry.

Shimizu indicates that potassium chlorate by itself "does not react with nitric acid, but if there is potassium chloride present in the potassium chlorate, it causes a violent reaction with the generation of chlorine dioxide. Accordingly, the amount of potassium chloride as an impurity is significant." In addition, some years ago a correspondent brought to the attention of the writer that the British Home Office seemed to think that calcium chlorate might be especially prone to spontaneous combustion, and had therefore ruled that hard water should not be used to damp star compositions because of the possibility that this compound might be formed by metathetical reaction between the potassium chlorate of the composition and the calcium salts in the water. These two observations lead to a review of the processes by which potassium chlorate was historically manufactured, with the thought that these might have had an effect.

Berthollet's first process for producing potassium chlorate involved passing chlorine gas through a solution of potassium carbonate. Later a solution of potassium hydroxide was used. The result was a mixture of potassium chloride, hypochlorite, and chlorate in water; these were separated by crystallization, the chlorate being the least soluble in water. Yields of chlorate were poor. Justus von Liebig introduced a process whereby calcium chlorate was produced by passing chlorine through hydrated lime (calcium hydroxide). Other chlorates were prepared by reacting the calcium chlorate, *e.g.*, with potassium chloride to produce calcium chloride and potassium chlorate, and separating the resultants by crystallization. The Berthollet and Liebig processes would likely have led to the presence of either some potassium chloride, some calcium chlorate, or both, in the final product, depending upon the process used and the level of quality control.

Electrolytic production of chlorates was introduced in Europe in the 1880's. The National Electrochemical Co. of Niagara Falls, started its production based upon processes used in England by its parent company, Allbright & Wilson, Ltd. North American Chemical Co. of Bay City, Michigan, undertook manufacture of sodium and potassium chlorates under processes licensed from United Alkali Company of England. Nearly all chlorates used in the United States prior to World War I were domestically manufactured. All perchlorates, on the other hand, were imported prior to 1910; in that year, Oldbury began domestic production. Imports increased after World War I. Between 1926 and 1933, all potassium chlorate was imported. In 1933 domestic production resumed, and by 1940, two plants satisfied the domestic market. Today, domestic production of potassium chlorate appears to have ceased, and Spanish,

Swiss, and Swedish products have been imported at various times to fill the demand.

Sources of sulphur also changed in the late nineteenth century. Until the development of the Frasch process, which made possible the extraction of deep sulphur deposits through liquation with superheated steam and subsequent pressurized pumping to the surface, all sulphur came from superficial deposits found in association with volcanic activity. Sicily was a great source. Volcanic sulphur, unlike Frasch sulphur, is typically associated with metallic sulphides (including those of antimony and arsenic), and these are difficult to remove either by liquation or by sublimation. In contrast, Frasch process sulphur is frequently pure enough to be usable without further refinement. The present writer, while travelling across Canada, has seen huge piles of it, by appearance quite pure, awaiting loading rail cars.

Does it not, then, suggest itself that firework accidents might be correlated with the use of chlorates and/or sulphur as produced by specific manufacturing processes? The availability of these materials has varied, but at least at some periods must have been limited to a traceable source (i.e., all foreign or all domestic). It might be harder to tabulate firework manufacturing accidents, as accounts of these would not have been very widely circulated before the rise of the wire services and the ascendancy of the "newsghoul." Certainly, however, the heyday of spontaneous combustion accidents, which was also the heyday of chlorate/sulphur compositions, was the middle nineteenth century, when electrolytic chlorates were not available and the Liebig process was perhaps most widely used. Additionally, volcanic sulphur containing many impurities (e.g., arsenic, antimony, and iron sulphides) unremovable even by washing was mixed with these probably impure and unstable chlorates.

The nature of nineteenth-century chlorate/sulphur compositions also deserves consideration. Most of them were star compositions in which sulphur formed a considerable proportion – between ten and twenty percent. They were dampened to make cut or pumped stars, often using a soured solution of gum arabic! The potential for reaction in the dampened state must have been considerable.

The present writer has had opportunity to examine a substantial number of unpublished manuscript documents containing firework formulæ and production notes. Those prepared in the middle nineteenth century include chlorate/sulphur colored star compositions quite similar to those in contemporary firework books. Information from the period just prior to World War I and following cites star compositions much like those still in use today, without sulphur. The only instances in which chlorate/sulphur admixture occurs at this period is in flash or dark report compositions. A key element in the conversion, although its exact date is unknown to me, appears

to have been the introduction of red gum (accroides resin), an inexpensive substitute for shellac. Since the potential for spontaneous combustion is increased in a situation where the composition is dampened, chlorate/sulphur combinations in star compositions posed more threat of spontaneous combustion than did such combinations in compositions used in a dry condition, such as flash powder. This, and the use of unreactive "varnish" grades of aluminum in early flash powders, explains the retention of sulphur in such applications at a time when it had been eliminated from star compositions.

Recapitulating and concluding:

- 1) Spontaneous combustion arising from the use of chlorates and sulphur was a greater fear, and a greater real hazard, in the nineteenth century, than was sensitivity either to shock or to friction. Spontaneous combustion occurred largely with star compositions that were dampened, permitting reactions to take place in solution that would not have taken place in a dry condition.
- 2) Acidity of sulphur owing to adsorbed sulphur oxides was not the sole cause of spontaneous combustion accidents. Impurities in the chlorates used – principally potassium chloride and calcium chlorate – also added to the instability, as did the presence of arsenic and antimony sulphides in the sulphur. These impurities were present because of the sources or processes from which the chlorates and sulphur were derived.
- 3) Today's electrolytic chlorates and Frasch process sulphur contain very little impurity compared to nineteenth-century chemicals. It is probable that the susceptibility of mixtures of modern chlorates and sulphur to spontaneous combustion is thus much reduced in comparison with comparable mixtures in the late nineteenth century.
- 4) The sensitivity of chlorate/sulphur compositions to shock and to friction is well-established, and should be borne in mind if such mixtures are to be made.
- 5) Dampening of chlorate/sulphur should be avoided, and hard (calcium-containing) water should be avoided in dampening any chlorate-containing mixture.
- 6) Flash powder and dark report compositions containing potassium chlorate may be used if handled carefully – and are sometimes essential in certain applications. Effort should be made to confine them to such essential applications.
- 7) Contacts between chlorate-containing star compositions and sulphur-containing meal powder primes do not appear to pose the hazard that straightforward mixtures of chlorates and sulphur do. However, any stars so primed should

be dried as quickly as possible, by techniques well-known to the craft, *viz.*, spreading in this layers on paper-lined, screen-bottomed trays, well-exposed to an atmosphere of moderate temperature (70°-80° Fahrenheit), well-dehumidified and maintained in constant circulation. Care should be taken in sifting excess meal from the dried stars.

Chlorate-containing mixtures, including a few chlorate/sulphur combinations, retain an appropriate place in fireworks. Chlorate stars using resinous fuels are particularly useful by virtue of their simplicity of preparation, ease of ignition, excellence of color, large flame envelope, and vigorous, speedy combustion that renders them unlikely to be blown blind ("high critical wind velocity").

Many of the anti-chlorate pronouncements the writer has heard are sweeping and uncritical. They more resemble the tub-thumping of an itinerant eyangelist on the sawdust trail, than they do either the measured and sceptical analysis of the dispassionate scientist, or the seasoned advice of the experienced craftsman. It is ironic that many such declarations come from persons who, equally uncritically, embrace ammonium perchlorate compositions, often featuring metal fuels, and rejecting dichromate buffering ("too toxic") although dichromate buffering is the only sure way to avoid spontaneous combustion! The as yet undiscovered hazards of such compositions brings to mind the difference illustrated by Ambrose Bierce in the epigraph to this essay.

ERNST PFANTODT

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Class "C" fireworks were clearly meant to be used with a certain sort of carefree abandon; recent PGI conventions have, unfortunately, eliminated much of this element, and Class "C" shooting has become a regimented activity. Certain individuals have even converted the burgeoning concern for safety into an opportunity for entrepreneurship by first contriving, for example, to institute rules requiring the use of safety paraphernalia, and then setting up to sell the same. The writer thinks the rot set in six or eight years ago, and has steadily progressed. He recalls his first serious run-in was at Ithaca in 1985, when he had been given a few pieces of the Japanese "senko hanabi" to try. Upon walking through the gate to the track he decided to try one, but within a few seconds of lighting the tiny firework he was accosted by an orange-vested wannabe commissar, who descended upon him shrieking "YOU CAN'T DO THAT HERE! CAN'T YOU SEE HOW CLOSE THE MAGAZINE IS?" (it was about 100 yards away).*

*The following article presents a proper view of the use of class "C" fireworks, which is in stark contrast to current attitudes within the Guild. Those of us who have actually witnessed an exemplification of the recommended technique can attest to its effectiveness.*

## ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND CLASS "C"

*Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci.*

-HORACE

Do you yearn for a good Class "C" shoot reminiscent of some of the early PGI conventions? Do you despise the wimpy, no-account, candy-ass bullshit regulations infesting more recent attempts at Class "C" shooting? Well, all aboard then, folks, because here we go!

Fired in the proper manner, Class "C" fireworks can be fun, stimulating, and even worthwhile. The most important steps are these easy-to-understand points:

- A. Quantity of Class "C" devices.
- B. Methods of priming devices.
- C. Type of Class "C" devices.
- D. The correct frame of mind in which to view a Class "C" display properly.

I would consider 200 lbs. of Class "C" as a reasonable minimum for a Class "C" display. The optimal scenario would be a dumptruck full of Class "C" dumped on a bonfire - maybe a whole bargeload all primed up!

The decent methods of priming include commercial powders (2F, 4F, meal, etc.) with nitrocellulose lacquer, gasoline, and campfires. In fact, when properly primed, the cases of Class "C" don't even have to be opened.

The types of Class "C" devices are also important. Since you can't make too much noise with them, try to get items that throw things as far as possible and make lots of sparks and light. Candles, birthday-cake items, and spinning fireworks such as New Sound Colorful Birds are preferred. Whistling items can also work nicely to accentuate the obnoxious factor. If you can simultaneously light and launch into the air large quantities of Class "C", so much the better (*e.g.* the now celebrated Dusterwinkle Candle Mine).

The final and perhaps most important point is the proper frame of mind for viewing a Class "C" shoot. For this, whether or not your safety glasses have been Officially Approved, you will need a quart of Jack Daniels, a good cigar or a good chew, and a supply of powdered-sugar doughnuts. Of course, the CPSC and others have so limited the type and amount of composition in every Class "C" device that we can be assured that all of these activities are perfectly safe.

Good luck, and happy shooting!

IMBIBO N. BOURBONINI

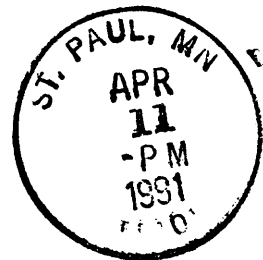
 **BUY**   
*Arm & Former*  
**BRAND**  
**CHEMICALS**

-  Chlorates of potash and baryta
-  Paris green
-  Oxide and nitrate of lead
-  Benzene and hexachlorobenzene
-  Bichromate of potash
-  Calomel

*Absolutely everything to aggravate the Safety-Fakers*



I.: O.: O.: J.:



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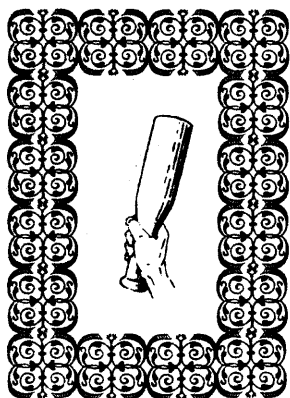
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# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

"Magna est Veritas et praevalabit." – I. *Esfdras*, iij: 41.

VOL. I

AUGUST, 1991

NO. 2.

## LACROSSE GASTRONOMIQUE, &c

*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate.*

–DANTE

Oh, hell, it's that time of year again... hot, muggy, and worst of all, ungodly busy. Because this year's PGII Convention is being held in a location most familiar to me, for this issue of *The Case Former*, I feel it best to digress from my usual editorial capacity and attempt to provide some vital information about LaCrosse and environs. So, good folks, here it is – the I.O.O.J. companion's guide to LaCrosse and vicinity.

**FOOD:** People sure like to eat in this part of the world, as evidenced by the sheer number of restaurants. Some are obviously better than others, so I offer here a few of the better ones.

- 1) *House of China* – Copeland Avenue and Monitor Street, LaCrosse. A Chinese joint with a salad bar? Sounds goofy, until you realize that almost *every* dining establishment in Wisconsin has a salad bar. Excellent Szechuan and Hunan cuisine, large portions and reasonable prices. A sure, safe bet for lunch or dinner.
- 2) *Hunan Chinese Restaurant* – Fourth and King Streets, LaCrosse. Good standard Chinese fare, generous portions. No salad bar though.
- 3) *Discascio's* – Southeast of LaCrosse on U.S. 14-61 in Coon Valley. A real treat. Fine pasta and veal, attentive service. Make sure to say "Hi" to Lou, the owner. He's a good guy and he loves fireworks.
- 4) *The Windmill Inn* – Also in Coon Valley. Top choice for breakfast. Huge volumes of food and coffee, reasonable prices. Order toast – it's made from homemade bread. Lunch is also available.
- 5) *Sabatino's Diner* – On Twilite Street, off U.S. 14-61 between LaCrosse and LaCrescent. Typical greasy spoon, open all night. Good food, reasonable.

**DRINK:** LaCrosse's entire reputation and economy are based upon the consumption of alcohol. You can't swing a cat but you don't hit a bar in downtown LaCrosse. These are the best I have found:

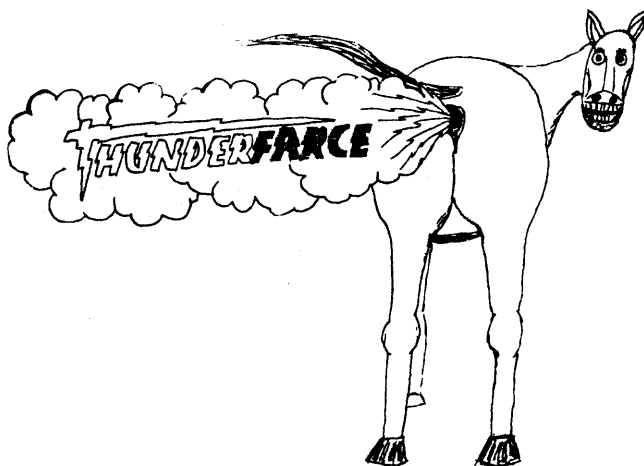
- 6) *The Casino* – Pearl Street between Third and Fourth, LaCrosse. Over 150 imported beers!! Ask to see "the list." If you have trouble deciding, ask Don – he knows. These people really know beer and how to serve it. Official I.O.O.J. convention headquarters.
- 7) *The Bluffsides* – 2712 Main Street, LaCrosse. Nice place, but specializes in those real sweet, fruity, candy-ass drinks that give you horrendous hangovers. Watch out – some of these go down like Kool-Aid and hit you like a ton of bricks.
- 8) *Shady Rest Inn* – On State Trunk Highway 162 in Chaseburg. Owners Jock and LaVonne Hastings love us. In fact, they love us so much that if you give them the due guard and sign of the I.O.O.J., you get a free shot of Jack Daniels. Need I say more? A must stop.
- 9) *Fjord Bar* – U.S. 14-61, Coon Valley. A real Wisconsin small-town bar. Cheap, potent drinks.
- 10) *Duty's* – State Trunk Highway 33, St. Joseph. Another one, complete with deer heads on the walls.

### MISCELLANEOUS:

- 11) *Snell's Liquor* – Two locations, Fifth and Main downtown on U.S. 14-61 south side. Don't bring booze from home; Snell's has what you need, and real cheap, too.
- 12) *St. Francis Hospital De-tox Unit* – Tenth and Market, LaCrosse. Excellent, well-trained staff, good food, decent service.

Hope this all helps. The I.O.O.J. will be holding a party on Saturday, August 10. Bring guns and ammo for target and trap shooting, and plenty

HOPE...



...EXPERIENCE (?)

of Class "C". Imbibo Bourbonini will be demonstrating proper Class "C" display methods. Music will be provided by the Bishops and by the Skeletons, of Springfield, Missouri. This promises to be a real blow-out. However it is a *private* event. If you are not a I.O.O.J.er, a candidate for induction, or a special guest, you ain't coming - PERIOD. Someone will inform you as to location at the convention, if we want you there.

I look forward to seeing you at the convention, hope you all arrive safely, and that your stay is comfortable and enjoyable. May Vulcan smile down on us all!

BIANCO GASOLINI

## JUNGLE FEVER

*Animus meminisse horret.*

-VIRGIL

"MELÉE AT FIREWORKS DISPLAY." "4 SHOT AT JUNETEENTH FESTIVAL AS PARTY TURNS VIOLENT," read the headlines of the daily papers of a large Texas city the morning after. "Juneteenth" refers, in standard English, to June 19, 1865, the day the blacks were emancipated in Texas. (You don't read about it in your school textbooks, but the Civil War continued after Appomattox in Texas, and the Yanks were soundly defeated in the last

battle!) The "Juneteenth fireworks display" in our city brings smirks or grimaces to those knowledgeable in the local trade. It has a history of being cancelled at the last minute because the organizers don't come up with the funding. When it *does* come off, it is always a challenge to find a willing operator to shoot the show - let's be candid - the unruly liquored-and-cracked-up crowds require that the operator have a police back-up to avoid a life-threatening situation!

Let's say that the Juneteenth show is not one that we go across town to see. It's at a park across the street from where my son is bused to junior high, over next to "Jamburgers" which is the "drug-store *cum* hamburger joint" for the schoolchildren. I could hear the show from my side of town as distant muffled thumps; little did I realize that enterprising young gunmen were using the WHOOMP! of the mortars to drown out the pings and pops of their handgun warfare, "triggering a melée in which four were shot, numerous others were beaten, and others still were trampled when the panicked crowd fled the violence."

I was reminded of the now infamous "C\*\*\*/D\*\*\* Letters" exchanged before the PGI Convention held at Gary, Indiana in 1988, in which D\*\*\* related the story of his own Gary, IN display:

Back in the mid-70s \*\*\* asked me to crew the Gary city fireworks show for the Fourth. Anyhow the Feds were checking me and my magazine and inventory almost monthly. Rumor had it that 1976 was "national

takeover day" and they were checking to see that all explosives were intact. I sent my best crew up to Gary with my trailer full of 'works and my M1 Garand and my stainless .357 combat magnum. A couple hundred rounds for each and orders: "If it starts, kick the mortars down - aim at the stands, lay the finale down and shoot you way out and try to get home!!" The guns were at arm's reach everytime the loaders went to the trailer for a new box!

I don't know who shot this year's Juneteenth show but the paper tells us it was a "hot 95° summer night" and "the crowd was restless" when the fireworks began a bit after 9 p.m. "Youths" were standing on the park stage watching the fireworks when they heard the pop-pop of gunfire. Police moved in to aid the wounded, but "numerous fights flashed throughout the thick crowd and more shots were fired." Operators from the past Juneteenth shows have told me of having bricks and bottles thrown at them, racist taunts like "MF honky!," "Yo whitey!," etc.; also "taking cover" and "hitting the dirt" not because of a low break or dud but because of errant gunfire!

It would seem that shows in such "neighborhoods" would provide a unique opportunity to train the novice shooter. Anything he-or-she is likely to encounter and more will be experienced in such an environment. This is one high-stress place where the PGI-certified shootperson can put his-or-her safety goggles, headphone ear protection, and flak jacket (preferably bulletproof vest) to good use. However, he-or-she should not wear his-or-her Birkenstocks - wear combat boots and flame-retardant clothing!

I would dearly love to see certain naïve white folks in the PGI (or APA for that matter) shoot one of our Juneteenth shows down South. For example, those PGI'ers who have on occasion written to me bemoaning that we have no "black people on the guild," or criticizing "the men's-club-railroad car-cigar-smoking-brandy-sniffing-elitist-sexist-atmosphere" that certain of us have been accused of fostering. I can think on one particular loudmouth flack and self-promoter I'd really love to see shoot a Juneteenth show. *God knows* what would become of this person's shiny happy HDPE mortars! (They might make good industrial-sized crack pipes!)

"Womyn-in-the-Guild" who are excited about the prospects of combat duty in the army could also volunteer for Juneteenth show detail. Perhaps some of the tough sisters of our local chapter of "Queer Nation" (no kidding) could offer to be bodyguards for our brave "Thelma and Louise" who volunteer to shoot way over in MLK, Jr. Park. I'd also like to see some of our eminent intellectual panjandrums shoot (and dodge the shooting) on June-

teenth for the happy-go-lucky crowd of 10,000 who created mayhem yesterday. Let them try to enforce NFPA safety and distance guidelines and maintain crowd control in the "fallout zone" while dodging .22 and .38 bullets! Maybe they could pull it off if they had the aid of the 35 police and the SWAT teams used to quell yesterday's riot!

Oh well. Some would say it's not too bright even to have a show in such a place. Others would counter that such reservations are "racist." But we are rapidly arriving at a time in this country where worrying about trivial matters like NFPA1123 at firework shows is going to be forgotten in the day-to-day struggle to survive drive-by shootings, gang warfare, muggings, robberies, and what-have-you. Perhaps it was said best in the "C/D" letters previously mentioned: "I wouldn't subject *my* wife to Gary, Indiana!"

SEBASTIANO SBRUFFI



## THE EFFECTS OF CONFINEMENT ON EXPLOSIVES AND EXPLOSIVE GASSES

*Indocti discant et ament meminisse periti.*

—HENSAULT

The physical laws which govern the mechanics of an explosion are well known to many I.O.O.J. members.

Boyle's Law states that the volume of a gas is inversely proportional to its pressure, and gives us mathematical means for predicting the effect of a change in pressure on a gas at constant temperature. It may be expressed as  $V \approx 1/P$ , where  $V$  is volume and  $P$  is pressure.

Charles' law states that the volume of a gas is directly proportional to its absolute temperature, expressed by the equation  $V \approx T$ , where  $V$  is volume and  $T$  is temperature.

From these two equations, a third is derived,  $V \approx T/P$ , from which the calculations of the behavior of explosive gasses may be made.

Obviously, any increase in temperature increases the pressure of a gas. Increasing temperature also vastly increases the rate at which chemical reactions occur, such as those that produce explosive gasses.

Containing such reactions in strong vessels serves to not only contain the heat necessary to propagate the chemical reaction more quickly, but also to provide the confinement necessary to boost gas pressures to highly explosive values.

Thus it may be said that confinement is a crucial factor governing the performance of many explosives, particularly those of the non-detonating variety, such as black powder, and to an arguable extent, flashpowder.

The importance of confining an explosive charge was intuitively apparent to me from the earliest beginnings of my experiments. A well-dried cherry-bomb worked much better than a soft or weak one; the stronger the casing, the better.

In the absence of a proper cardboard casing, necessity one day prodded Stephano and myself to fill an empty Testors model airplane paint bottle with flashpowder, fused with Visco through a hole in the screw-on cap. Much impressed by the resulting section of collapsed stone wall that bordered Stephano's driveway, not to mention his toppled cinderblock cookout so rendered by a similar device later that week, the principle of confinement was thoroughly established to us. Soon the pill vials, perfume bottles, salt shakers, spice bottles and baby-food jars had all but vanished from our houses. And if glass was strong, steel was stronger.

With this in mind, the next logical question was: what is designed specifically to contain gasses under pressure? Well, a CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge is, for one thing. We obtained one and brought it to my basement laboratory, painstakingly filling it with flashpowder and fusing it with Visco. Stephano touched it off in front of my house. Standing not more than 35 ft. from it, the blast was most noteworthy, as was the divot in the sidewalk. An outstanding success, except for the sharp, jagged piece of twisted steel that it took a pair of vice-grips and all my scrawny might to pull from the clapboard side of my house next to the kitchen window. We'd have to watch that flying steel and glass problem. The CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge grenade became our standard device for neighborhood torment, terror, vandalism and fishing. Yet it was not without problems. Getting the fuses to stay firmly in place, yet watertight, was a surprisingly vexing challenge. Epoxy wasn't yet invented, Elmer's didn't stick to steel, and friction tape sometimes leaked.

"Solder 'em in, boys," was Mr. Stouk's advice, when Roberto Stenello and I ran the problem past him. "It doesn't get that hot," he said before we could reply, no doubt well-reading our exchange of askance glances, which harbored images of littered fingers and hospital rooms. Well, Mr. Stouk was a grown-up, wasn't he? Sure he was - he could fix our go-kart engines, and he swilled countless Carling Black Labels, so he should know best, right? With a loaded grenade in the vice, the soldering iron warmed up, came the moment of truth, and that was where the image of a finger-strewn basement won out; we unplugged the iron and muddled by with friction tape.

What else confines explosive gasses? Internal combustion engines, for another, and there was one of those on Stephano's brother's mini-bike. I took the cylinder head off the old Briggs and Stratton, placed the piston at the bottom of its stroke, and upon that placed a film canister full of flashpowder, replacing the head and running our last, *FAR TOO*

*SHORT*, piece of Visco through the spark plug hole.

It was a quiet Saturday, and this morning's target was the peaceful picnic grounds and tennis court area near Kelly Pond. With the infernal engine in tow, we headed into the woods which sheltered the picnic tables. I agreed to light the damned thing, but my heart wasn't in it. This fuse was *SHORT*, gang, and everyone else was under cover when I tore out of those woods. I'll never forget the hissing screech that accompanied the blast from that baby, as all those pieces of cooling fin and head and cylinder ripped through air, branches and foliage. Autumn fell early in the park that morning, severed leaves and limbs raining down even as we walked back up the hill to ground zero to inspect our work. It seemed like minutes before the pieces of metal stopped dropping through the trees' canopy. This explosion was one of our finer efforts, and we surveyed the scene with awe; nothing remained at all of the engine where it had been, save a splotch of oil and fragments of the boot plate. A dozen trees surrounding the site bled sap from shrapnel wounds.

The explosion seemed sure to bring Officer Maccini, but fetched only a pair of ashen-faced tennis players whose game we'd rent asunder. All in all, it was a great success, yet I was greatly troubled by all those bleeding trees. It was a miracle that I hadn't joined them. It was obvious that, while ideal for mayhem and destruction, steel-cased devices were ill-suited to recreational explosions. After all, the whole idea was to *watch* the explosion, and if you risked gathering a beanful of steel to do so, something was wrong.

Tommy DeChecco, my colleague from across town, reported much the same thing. His devices, known simply as DeChecco bombs, were frightening concoctions produced by:

- 1) Pounding one end shut on a length of galvanized or thin steel pipe.
- 2) Bend this end over in a vice and pound flat.
- 3) Pack pipe with home-made gunpowder.
- 4) Pound other end shut, double over in vice, and pound flat.
- 5) Drill  $\frac{3}{32}$ " hole in middle of bomb.
- 6) Insert Visco and solder into place.

Tommy got away with making quite a number of these devises, which hissed furiously and spit gout of flame before exploding, and retired from bomb-making with life and limb somehow intact.

Stephano and I were already considering the abandonment of steel and glass as casings when the last straw arrived.

Stephano set off an 8 inch firecracker, made of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch gaspipe with threaded endcaps, on his sidewalk. One endcap drove deep into the side of Stephano's already battle-weary house, leaving a ghastly wound when we'd pried it out.

And so it was that we returned to our origins and our paper tubes. They're not as strong as steel, so massively constructed casings, reinforced with fiberglass, had to be built. Half inch thick walled cardboard tubes of three inch inside diameter, plugged with one inch thick oak endcaps, doweled and heavily glued into place, became our standard firecracker. A sixteen inch long firecracker so constructed could hold over two pounds of flashpowder, which was usually enough for our purposes; namely the humiliation and torment of the authority and citizenry of Boston's western suburbs. In a state where all fun is illegal, particularly fireworks, and where we had been stopped, interrogated, searched, chased and endlessly bedeviled by the police for a little harmless fun since childhood, we had developed a fine palate for revenge, and now it was ours to serve up, our recipes having been perfected to a high degree.

With these purposes and goals clearly in mind, Stephano and I embarked upon a methodical program of pyrotechnic retribution. Armed with a series of large, cardboard-walled firecrackers of various sizes, we began creating horrific explosions, close enough to populated areas to jam the police switchboards with irate complaints and frantic inquiries, yet without causing any damage whatever. We arranged things so that it was difficult to determine exactly where the explosion had originated, often hanging the devices from twine in tall tree tops, so that they created enormous air blast and little else.

Although we have no way of knowing exactly how much official consternation our efforts might have wrought, we are satisfied that we doled out sufficient misery to certain individuals with badges to at least partially even the score. We ceased operations when we learned of the involvement of the State Fire Marshal's office in the resulting investigation.

Several of our nights' work were rewarded by written recognition in the next days' newspapers, the following example appearing on the front page of *The Middlesex News*, not all that many years ago.

## Explosion a mystery

NATICK — A mysterious explosion Tuesday night sent authorities scurrying around town looking unsuccessfully for its cause.

Police said they received several calls reporting the explosion just after 11 p.m. but no one could find any damage or other problems associated with the explosion.

A caller to *The Middlesex News* who lives on Chestnut

Street right near Lake Cochituate, said he saw a flash of light in the sky in the general direction of Natick Labs followed by a "very big explosion. It was definitely something big."

Calls to the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Weather Service added no clues as to the origin of the explosion.

Police said the explosion may have been a sonic boom caused by a jet.

Of course, once I got that job quarry blasting and learned the wonders of high explosives, the role of confinement in recreational explosions was minimal, the sticks of dynamite detonating completely without confinement. It became effortless to produce colossal explosive yields which frightened even Stephano and myself at first.

And yet, with that limitless power of ANFO and pentolite within easy grasp, something was lost. Stephano and I spent many pleasant evenings mixing powder, building bombs, designing ever bigger and better ones, and then gloating over our creations, all the while tossing down innumerable beers. I miss that. Just for old times sake I'd like to... let's see, I've got 10 pounds of perchlorate in the basement, plus a few of alumo, and a three inch cardboard mortar, some fuse... I wonder what Stephano's up to tonight?

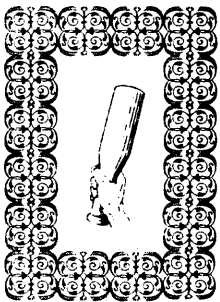
EDUARDO TELLERINI



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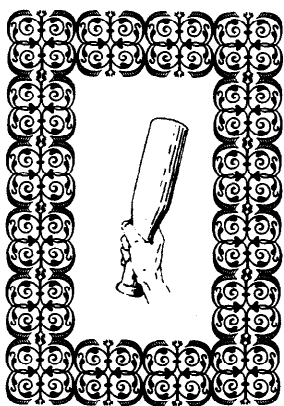
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# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

"Magna est Veritas et prævalebit." – I. *Esdras*, iij: 41.

VOL. I

MARCH, 1992

NO. 3.

## AVANT-PROPOS

*To make each prisoner pent  
Unwillingly represent  
A source of innocent merriment,  
Of innocent merriment.*

– W.S. GILBERT

While the I.O.O.J., like many another order charged with the safeguarding of an ancient craft and mystery, may be said to be "constituted with time immemorial status," its first published manifestation was issue no. 1 of *The Case Former*, appearing in April of 1991. Although it was distributed to only a small list, totalling less than one hundred – either companions of the I.O.O.J., or a select few candidates and others to whom the publishers thought it might interest – its impact was far greater. The combination of photocopiers and telefax machines with its pointed satire, touching the raw nerves of those it lampooned, saw to that.

Some months ago one of the publishers received a scurrilous letter from a self-important fellow who will, for the purpose of these pages, be identified as Mr. Mountebank Witless. You all know this person – he is the one who has to wear a shirt two sizes too large, to accommodate all of those silly patches and badges. Perhaps he never got enough merit badges as a Boy Scout, and is compensating for it. The effect of this get-up, on a grown man, is as incongruous as that of the South American generalissimo's uniform worn by doormen at a certain class of hotel; the difference is that the hotel doorman is required by his employer to wear what he wears, whereas Mr. Witless has only himself to blame.

Mr. Witless took us to task for publishing the article "Flaming Justice," which he averred was a racist attack on the wife of a P.G.I.I. member. We asked Mr. Witless how he came to that conclusion – was it that the member's wife was a negress? that she abused marijuana? was grotesquely obese? We had no acquaintance with this member's wife (we told Mr. Witless), nor any fault to find with

her, save perhaps her taste in husbands. The story was in fact a true account of an event that took place some years ago in Ft. Worth, Texas, and we doubt very much that the wife of the member in question emigrated thence all the way to LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The story seemed to us to be a beautiful illustration of the principle of justice enunciated in W.S. Gilbert's libretto to "The Mikado."

We doubt that Mr. Witless understood that, or even knows who Gilbert (or Sullivan) were. His literary tastes were set forth in a fulsome encomium, printed in the *P.G.I. Bulletin*, to the publisher of an irregular periodical that commingles scatological attacks by name upon long-standing P.G.I. members with articles about spacemen in flying saucers visiting the Earth and allegations that government officials are snooping through the publisher's mail. Occasionally the publication talks about fireworks. We would not *dare* to express an opinion about that publication, but would like to know what a competent clinical psychologist thinks of it.

Mr. Witless also averred that the suggestion, in *The Case Former* No. 2, indicating that the I.O.O.J. would be holding a party on Saturday, August 10, and members should bring guns and ammo for target and trap shooting, as well as plenty of Class "C", was a "threat to the P.G.I. officers." As those companions who were present at the highly successful party at "Shaggy's" will attest, this was a perfectly straightforward declaration; we had trap-shooting in the afternoon, Class "C" after dark, and a very convivial induction of new members and installation of officers. How Mr. Witless could construe this as a "threat" is another question that begs the attention of a competent clinical psychologist.

*The Case Former* will *not* cease, because of such absurd importunings, to pillory those deserving of ridicule in its pages. It is not to be expected that those pilloried will be pleased; but no consequence save being the butt of "innocent merriment" will ever befall such people. That, after all, ought to be enough. It is unfortunate that the P.G.I.I. must harbor individuals who see it as a means of ego-gratification, being "big fish in a small pond," or



who regard it as a wonderful flock of sheep to be fleeced. A good honest horse-laugh is the best possible remedy for all their cant and hypocrisy and we will go on providing it whenever and wherever we can. Mountebanks - be warned! *Great is the truth, and it SHALL prevail.* ¶

PASQUINO DEI FUGISTI

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## FIREWORKS SAFETY

There are as many views regarding fireworks safety as there are pyrotechnists: a hot and much-debated topic. Since I've never been able to resist fueling a conflagration, I think I'll have a go at it here.

Our society's obsession with cradle-to-grave safety, and our legal system's embrace of the same, means ever-increasing encroachments upon the range of fireworks activity which we can legally engage in, be it for business or recreation.

In the name of safety, the professional pyrotechnist now finds himself under the governmental auspices of the B.A.T.F., B. Ex., D.O.T., E.P.A., C.P.S.C., as well as state and local fire and police authorities. Economically, the insurance industry enters into the mess. While not strictly illegal, in places, to shoot a display outside of National Fire Protection Association (N.F.P.A.) guidelines, doing so frequently nullifies insurance protection. For reasons unfathomable to me, elements of the pyrotechnic community have actually participated in the writings of these codes. What sort of person cleans, oils, and sharpens a guillotine while sitting on death row? Some of these persons are P.G.I.I. members; another contradiction of realities. If N.F.P.A. codes were enforced upon P.G.I.I. activities, the latter would cease to exist as we know them. Conventions would be reduced to a handful of idiots lighting Black Cats in the dirt. Has the P.G.I.I. some immunity to the N.F.P.A., or has its date with the headsman yet to be arranged?

In purely practical terms, (as opposed to those government and insurance) some general observations with regard to safety may be made.

First, manufacture is dangerous. Given the sensitivity of pyrotechnic compositions to mechanical, thermal, electrical, and chemical initiation, and the number of such opportunities for such initiation in the production of fireworks, it becomes obvious that accidents are inevitable. History supports me here. A look at recorded manufacturing accidents whose causes can be ascertained shows that sometimes they just simply happen, like the bumper sticker says. The backside of that is that the majority of them were caused by ignorance, stupidity, and indifference,

and could have been avoided. Can knowledge, intelligence and responsibility be legislated into being? The obvious answer cannot be found in our laws.

I have no wish to talk down to anyone in this regard. As I once alluded to, I used to make a damned fine flashpowder by grinding  $\text{KClO}_4$ , aluminum, and sulfur together in a porcelain mortar and pestle. I did this for months without event, gaining confidence in the procedure's safety, until one evening when Roberto Davenportiano (Italization just doesn't always work) and I decided to make a FIRECRACKER. We smoked about a gram of blond hash and floated down to the Laboratory. Stoned as a statue, I put the elbow grease to about a third of a beer can's worth of flashmix in that porcelain rig. Stephano and his brother visited briefly a few minutes before my kiss-off, and warned me that I'd blow myself up. They were right. I'd just gotten into the grinding rhythm of things with Creedence when the world went searing white, my ears pounded, and the basement stank of burning flesh, hair, and clothing. Better Run Through the Jungle.....

Dav was standing about two feet behind and beside me when I exploded, eating pistachio nuts. When I began to hear again, he was asking me if I was all right.

"No Dav, I'm not all right," was my reply, followed by, "Put me out, Dav."

He did that, and then I staggered back into a corner, blind, where I stepped on a rake. Another fine mess.

My Dad came charging down the basement stairs, bellowing about those damned explosions all the time, and realized what had happened. As he led me up the stairs, a couple minutes later, my vision began to return. That experience was almost worth the price of admission. I'd had perhaps four or five minutes totally blind, able only to smell my own cremation and hear the panic around me, and I was in poor humor. Getting my eyesight back, followed by the two-week morphine holiday in intensive care, fixed me up just fine, although my hands still break open and bleed rather easily, and I still have a fond remembrance of morphine.

There really is no moral to this story except the obvious: Boneheads that get hammered and ignorantly screw around with explosives will probably blow themselves up. Always have, always will. Having survived that experience, I decided to do the only prudent thing; I majored in chemistry at an eastern university, so that I might get hammered and screw around with explosives safely. It has worked so far, although tomorrow's always another day.

Several years with a major in East Coast display company greatly increased my knowledge of and

skills with fireworks, which brings me to my second point. Display operation is dangerous. I have cross-stapled countless finale chains together without event. Yet, one tragic day, a display operator with another company struck a spark with a staple gun and lost his life for doing so. Again, like flash-powder, any manipulation of explosive/combustible materials contributes some form of energy, be it friction, impact, thermal, electrical (static), in the direction of that compound's reaction threshold. Maybe a given action won't prove eventful in hundreds, or thousands of repetitions. Nevertheless, many are potentially dangerous in that they approach that reaction threshold to a largely quantifiable degree.

When fireworks are safely assembled they sometimes don't work as they should. There can be an awful lot of work potential in those shells, and when things go wrong, that can be used to dig big holes, throw much steel, and overturn other mortars. It happens. There is no certain way to know whether a shell will work other than to light it. Barricades? Sure, they work, but not everyone is going to lug some concrete slabs around for each display. Electrical firing can put one at a much greater distance from potential trouble, but not everyone does that either.

Roberto Cassiano, a display operator and friend, has a horrifying collection of jagged, twisted, heavy steel fragments from mortars that have exploded on him over a long career in fireworks. Faulty shells, every one. Bob does not manufacture, I should hasten to point out. He barricades his electrical firing positions like Quadaffi does his house. I snickered a bit at this practice until I'd seen his shrapnel collection. Now I'm sort of meek about it, realizing that I was real lucky, and lucky to have good shells, those years we fired from barges on Boston's Charles River, not many yards from an awful lot of potential hurt. Purchasing and building first rate shells is the single most important procedure to keep from starting a shrapnel collection of your own.

My third and last point is that Class "C" is dangerous, to an extent. How many times have such artifices whizzed just barely past your head? Probably a few, if you're reading this. A few inches either way could have cost an eye in many cases. Statistically, how many of us lose eyes? I really don't know, but how many of us walk around with eye-patches? I've yet to see a one, nor do I personally know anyone or know of anyone who has lost an eye to Class "C". Which isn't to say that it can't happen; we all know better.

The most convincing evidence of the *relative* safety of Class "C" is the annual Lake Party, hosted by Imbibo Bourbonini, of Minnesota, of which many I.O.O.J. members are veterans. At this event, scores of underdressed, overintoxicated lunatics in the last stages of alcohol poisoning totter over to the roaring campfire and dumpin cases of Class

"C". Then they caper about hysterically with Colorful Birds, Jumping Jacks, Sunflower Helicopters, etc., buzzing and whizzing and screeching in a fiery hail around them. The result: An orgy of ocular injury? No, of course not. Nothing happens to them at all, save the occasional blistered finger, singed hair, or scorched feet. In that event, they are promptly sent to the medical tent for the administration of first aid; Jack Daniels and powdered sugar donuts, Dr. Bourbonini's standard prescription for such complaints.

An attitude of contemptuous disregard for safety, coupled with vast intoxication, is therefore the approved I.O.O.J. method for Class "C" display. (That'll be a question on the written part of your I.O.O.J. Class "C" Certification Test. You may be asked to demonstrate this technique in the practical exam.)

The point of these ramblings is that there *is* an element of danger in working with and using fireworks, be they class A, B, or C, and be it for manufacture, display, or just screwing around. We accept that. We do our best to assess and minimize risk, and go forth. If someday we get hurt, we accept that, too, and the responsibility for it. Way it goes.

Now, our society these days doesn't like that. Bad attitude, Little Brother. We are to be saved from ourselves, our dangerous toys taken away. In practical terms, this is happening by our government regulating us into oblivion. Several experienced professionals I've talked to see the day coming when it will simply be too complex, expensive, and exasperating to continue in the fireworks business. This is not speculation - it is already happening.

The number of federally licensed fireworks manufacturers in America almost certainly will drop in coming months (and may have done already), as the effects of new B.A.T.F. rulings manifest themselves, along with other agencies' added garottes. The Feds insist that a dropped level of licensed activity is not the intended outcome, but rather an eventuality of, their rulings. Yet they knew what would happen before the rulings' imposition. I'll leave you to ponder it. If you need time, don't bother.

I don't see a great deal to be done about the government. We don't have the power, money, or cohesiveness to fight them on any meaningful scale. Of more practical concern is the creeping of these attitudes into the P.G.I.I. Safety zealotry, without reason or decency, is a nasty business that plays very poorly indeed to this crowd. We've had enough from Big Brother. It is sad that the role of policeman is so often coveted by the empty and impotent.

During the set-up of the 1991 P.G.I.I. public display in LaCrosse, several of us were pestered by

a mangy little tyrant plodding purposefully about like an orange-bedecked Cotton Mather, threatening us for smoking our cigarettes and drinking our beer, although none were drunk or smoking near live material. Another I.O.O.J. member was *ordered* to wear safety goggles near (not *in*, mind you – just *near*) the Class “C” area by another Orange Entity. The goggles were promptly trod into the dust beneath a bootheel and the matter was settled. Also, it apparently was decided that we were too irresponsible to be trusted with our Class “C” purchases. Of those that bought them, most retrieved them (minus some articles that “disappeared” in storage) at week’s end. I wonder what that did to the Class “C” vendors’ sales.

While I personally disagree with the rulings that have apparently become poorly announced policy regarding P.G.I.I. Convention behavior, I suppose I can understand their origins; an unfortunate sign of the times. If indeed this is P.G.I.I. policy, (i.e. mandatory safety goggles, mandatory halo) instead of the personal initiative of a couple of loose cannons, it would be nice to announce it very openly, so that those of us that can’t live thusly will otherwise convene, as has already begun to happen, and those that do show up won’t be surprised.

If the P.G.I.I.’s trend towards safety fascism continues, some of us will just stay home. Who needs the hassle? Somewhat more likely is that we will stop taking the P.G.I.I. seriously, as it now exists. Those that poured countless hours and dollars (and it has become common knowledge that not everyone was even properly reimbursed for their materials) into the LaCrosse show, will probably bring a string of crackers and a fistful of bottlerockets to Idaho, if they go at all.

It is unfortunate that things have come to this. The P.G.I.I. has grown more quickly than anyone might have guessed, and with that has necessarily grown the need for greater organization, and perhaps to a degree, greater regulation. But to have such regulations enforced in the form of constant interference by abrasive, discourteous orange-vested vermin is a kiss of death for an already-oppressed minority such as American Pyrotechnists. My reading of the situation is that the days of open-ended contributions and efforts are over for many until such a time as the P.G.I.I. takes an accounting of its regulations and enforcement personnel.

It pains me greatly to break away from my happier, lighter pennings. I’m looking forward to leaving this political miasma behind and thinking of far brighter things, like fuses and timing devices and what can go oh-so-very-wrong with them. Until then...

EDUARDO TELLERINI

## THE MALEVOLENT ARTIFICER

*Amicula, delicia, num is sum que mentiar tibi?*

– MILANO

Countless volumes have been written about the arts, many of them devoted to the dark or obscene side. In this regard, pyrotechny, the noblest art, has never been sufficiently explored, and so I hope to do.

I intend to write about many pyrotechnic people, devices, and practices, all purely fictional. Any resemblance to real persons, living or (wished) dead, is purely coincidental. The exaggerations in this column are not to be taken seriously; do not build any of these devices, or use these practices.

The writer hopes we all learn something from this column, even if at times some might call it hyperbolic or “mean-spirited.”

I intend to award my “Pyrojerks” certificates in two classes. The first is the “Cedric Adams” award; this is for people who are purely destructive to pyrotechny. The second is the “Robert Mapplethorpe” award – enough said. Now here are your first two Super Special fun things to (not) do – unless you’re really artistic.

### S \* \* \* S \* \* \* Litterbug Shell

Take one roll of cheap toilet paper. Ram a 1" thick clay plug centered around a piece of stout match in one end of the core, as when claying-in a fusillading shot. Fill the remaining space with FF blasting powder, leaving about an inch on the other end of the core to plug with more clay. Spike with 12 vertical strings and lift and leader dry (bottom fused). Shoot these *only* at night – they don’t look so good in daylight.

### S \* \* \* S \* \* \* Ready Box Mine

(as exhibited at the 1991 P.G.I.I. Convention)

*Quivi le brutte Arpie lor nidi fanno*

*Che cacciar de le Strofade i Troiani*

*Con tristo annunzio di futuro danno.*

*Ali hanno late, e colle e visi umani*

*Piè con artiglie, e pennuto il gran ventre*

*Fanno lamenti in su li alberi strani.*

– DANTE, *Inf.* xij, 10-16

Boy, this is real easy. Take a box two feet long, three feet wide, and one foot high. Place an inch of powder uniformly on the bottom. Over this put a perforated sheet of chipboard. Fill the remaining space with stars, comets, firecrackers, jumping jacks, etc. Now glue on the lid.

Through a small hole at the bottom of the box thread a piece of Visco fuse about five feet long. Light and retire. This mine really gets the action started at any show or competition. The crew or competitors are nicely silhouetted for the viewing

crowd. It is especially nice when viewed over water (we think those who saw its debut at the LaCrosse convention will agree).

Well, enough for now.

MILANO GIANSLAVI

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## IT'S TIME TO CLEAN HOUSE (FROM THE BOTTOM UP)

*When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;  
The truth is great and shall prevail,  
When none cares whether it prevail or not.*

— COVENTRY PATMORE

*Our mistake is in supposing men better than  
they are. They are bad, and will act their character out.*

— FISHER AMES

Reading Bianco Gasolini's thoughts about the unpleasantness within the P.G.I in 1990 thanks to "F(r)iends of the P.G.I" brought up a lot of feelings for me, since I was one of the primary targets of that effort of a libel and whispering campaign. Rather shell-shocked (!) from all of that, I greeted the approach of 1991's convention with anticipatory fear and trepidation, tail between legs, sort of wondering: "What will it be THIS year?" Soon enough I was to have my answer. On May 31, 1991 I received a letter from a friend who is a fellow collector of old fireworks books and pyrophemera. In the past I had sold him a number of books when I was asked to disperse another collection. I also had sold him some of my own duplicate titles, making no secret about the fact that since my wife and I took the plunge and started our own businesses in 1987, times have often been very lean, and sometimes cash has had to be scared up from whatever corner. The recession since last summer hasn't helped matters either.

Anyway, my friend was writing to let me know that he had received a phone call from a very well-known, eminent (if blow-hard) collector and publisher who is also "official A.P.A historian," who called to ask whether he had any books to sell to Mr. Bigwig's "museum." Using a blank where my own name belongs, my friend reported the ensuing conversation verbatim as follows:

*A.P.A Blowhard:* "So what new books have you gotten?"

*Friend:* "I bought a 1745 d'Orval and a set of the three Faber books recently."

*Blowhard:* "Anything new in the works?"

*Friend:* "I know someone who has [4 books] but he wants \$3,000 and will only sell all four

as a group."

*Blowhard:* "Who has these, \_\_\_\_\_ [my name]?"

*Friend:* "No, it's someone else."

*Blowhard:* "Have you bought a lot of books from \_\_\_\_\_?"

*Friend:* "Not a lot. I bought a couple of books two years ago he was selling for [someone else]."

*Blowhard:* "Well, if \_\_\_\_\_ needs money, he should stop using cocaine."

*Friend:* "You think \_\_\_\_\_ is on cocaine?!"

*Blowhard:* "Oh yeah, real bad. *Everyone* knows that!"

Well, my friend wrote me that "thinking I ought to know what the bigwig collector, A.P.A historian, label seller, and publisher was saying about me." Need I add that I was crestfallen and thought, "Well, here we go again - two months before convention time and the shit starts flying." My wife took it much harder, enraged and indignant at the constant false attacks on my character and integrity which for years have emanated from a certain well-known, small group of small-minded but influential men in the Guild who seem to stop at nothing to ruin me or at least my pyrotechnic-related publishing. She grabbed the phone and was in the midst of dialing up Mr. Bigwig (she got his number out of a big AFN ad) until I stopped her and said it would just be grist in "their" mill if she "gave them a piece of her mind." Bear in mind I've never met Mr. Bigwig, much less spoken to him by phone. So he gets a call from so-and-so's pissed-off wife or even me - he'll just deny everything and say "You'll never guess who called me up the other day."

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my wife, still upset, called my father about the matter. He was once an executive in a large oil company and I suppose she felt he would have as much experience as anyone in dealing with "difficult people," and knew I would be too disgusted and embarrassed by the whole matter to seek his legal advice. She later told me dad gave her a "magna est veritas et prævalebit" type pep talk, but he also added, "Well I wonder why that Guild they are all in will tolerate such behavior from its members without its resulting in any censure?" It does seem a fair enough question, especially when it comes to mind that in the past Mr. A.P.A Bigwig Historian disrupted the seminar of a rival at 1990's convention. My question on that: Why wasn't Mr. Bigwig thrown out on his ear at that time for disorderly conduct? I also knew about Mr. Bigwig's large amount of advertising placed with an East Coast pyropublisher who has also carried on a "whispering campaign" about yours truly through the years. I also knew about Bigwig's treatment of a dear West Coast friend who knows a helluva lot

more about "fireworks history," who was barred from a Western Pyrotechnic Association meeting at Bigwig's home in a degrading and humiliating fashion, and threatened with police action should he show up! This nonplussed friend told me that upon calling to complain to the president of W.P.A., he was told that "[Mr. Bigwig] is a very important member of our club and it would be hard to do anything since people have traveled great distances to attend the meeting at his house." Once again, no one dared to censure Mr. Bigwig for his conduct, although in fairness to W.P.A., they did later pass a bylaw covering such situations.

Hearing about Mr. Bigwig getting off scot-free with such reprehensible conduct brought back memories of 1990, when, as the subject of published libels, I had written the P.G.I. officers seeking redress, receiving instead a copy of a letter also sent to the chief "F(r)riend of the P.G.I." asking us not to make trouble should we attend the convention – I was addressed not as the victim of a libel, but in second person plural with the perpetrator!

It seems to me that the people in the leadership positions of the P.G.I. are abdicating their responsibility to discipline, or at least have guidelines of conduct for disciplining those members of our society who persist in libelous, slanderous, and reprehensible behavior against fellow members. Perhaps also a closer scrutiny of the background and character of applicants for P.G.I. membership would eliminate the need for draconian safety regulations and training, although a certain clique has a vested interest in the *status quo*. Tacit support is appreciated, but I know of few people who will dare to stand up and confront these bastards. There needs to be more than one courageous person who will stand up and say "Enough!" and expose these whispering campaigns, vicious gossip and innuendo – and as of 1990 even "outright libel" – which these individuals pursue for their own private agenda which I suspect involves personal gain and putting what they see as a "competitor" out of commission. Let's call it what it is.

Considering the way I feel now, I am inclined to complete the current projects in progress and then wash my hands of further involvement, perhaps attempting to find some other society of people who can see to it that those within their ranks act with a modicum of decency and where those who aren't gentlemen will not be tolerated and will quickly be shown the back door.

In a recent editorial in *Chronicles* magazine, it was stated that change will never come from the top; instead we must "clean house" or nation or whatever from the bottom upwards. Charity and good behavior begin at home. So I think a smaller, close-knit and closely screened group like the I.O.O.J. is uniquely suited for this task of clean-

ing the Augean stables of P.G.I. That you *can* read in the *Case Former* of my recent experiences at the hands of eminent panjandrums in the Guild just proves my point – this story would never see the light of day in the *Bulletin* or for that matter as a letter on the P.G.I. officers' desks. I think the time has come to acknowledge that this type of sleaziness is a rampant problem in P.G.I., that it touches lives and hurts entire families, perhaps even ruins businesses and livelihoods in the long-run. What David Hall said in 1989 about P.G.I. censorship also applies to these "Whispering Campaigns" – "If it can happen to me, it can happen to you." In 1989, the chattering cesspoolers had me a member of the Ku Klux Klan; in 1990, I was "capturing and controlling information." In 1991, I'm to be a drug addict. One wonders what 1992 will hold! How about a cocaine-addicted Kluxer who captures and controls information?

Mr. Bigwig, the irony is that you're pointing your fat finger at the wrong man on this cocaine canard. And you and your ilk damn well know who rightfully deserves any such accusation: Mr. NFDOC, Mr. ABQ 83 himself, darling and hero of many of the selfsame P.G.I. commidiots who now persist in giving *me* such a hard time! You can bet I got the word out far and wide when I heard about Mr. NFDOC's cocaine-trafficking indictments last year. Did we hear a *word* of acknowledgment of this news from those who so viciously lashed out at Mr. NFDOC's detractors in 1982-83? Hell no! Those of us who *did* question NFDOC, the "skimming" of the gate take, and all the rest of the sad sordid story were branded "naysayers" and "troublemakers" for our concern back then. I try to clear my good name of slander now and again I'm branded a "troublemaker." Such craven behavior from our powerbrokers "who should know better" is beneath contempt. How *soon* they forget – and how *often* they forget!

We can receive mass mailouts mocking concern for freely-voted honoraria, yet never a satisfactory explanation for, say, the \$7,000+ that "disappeared" during a certain treasurer's term of office. What priorities for muckraking! What selective concern! *Dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas*. I must wonder what sort of people will harbor liars and slanderers in their midst while wagging fingers in the faces of innocent men who cry out to defend their good names. These people had better never again tell me to "shut my mouth" and "not make trouble" till they clean up their own stinking trough!

FLAGELLO DEL CALUNNIATORE



## LINGUINI TELLERINI

In keeping with the spirit of this publication, I'd like to pass on a recipe for linguini that is actually a synthesis of several preparations that I've encountered and combined. When completed, this recipe yields a linguini in rich, thick, creamy white sauce, heavily accented with garlic and seafood.

First, sauté  $\frac{2}{3}$  lb. small to medium shrimp, and the same weight of scallops, in butter and garlic. With a slotted spoon, drain and remove the seafood from the resulting liquid. Do not over-cook the seafood, as this toughens it. Note: Use not a dab, but a *generous dollop* of crushed garlic for the sauté. You can buy the garlic crushed, or crush it yourself with a garlic press. Some people peel the cloves and liquefy them in a blender, but I like to crunch 'em up in my trusty mortar and pestle. It comes out silver that way for some reason, but tastes great.

Next, with the seafood set aside, add a tablespoon of olive oil, and at least another rounded tablespoon of crushed garlic, to the shrimp/scallop/butter broth. In this, sauté  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup minced green onions,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup finely broken up cooked bacon, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fresh mushrooms. Sauté, stirring constantly, until onions are done. Note: That wasn't a misprint, and I'm not joking – use at least a *rounded tablespoon* of garlic, which is the soul of this recipe, for the second sauté.

Now, take an empty pickle jar, or something with a secure lid, and in it mix three heaping tablespoons of white flour with six or eight ounces of milk or half-and-half. Shake very thoroughly and set aside.

Next, flood sauté pan with one pint half-and-half and  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup white wine, and stir in thoroughly.

Bring to medium high and pour in flour/milk mix, a little at a time, stirring constantly until thick. A blend of parmesan and romano cheeses may now be added and stirred in. Not, much, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup.

Now, add seafood back to sauce and let warm briefly on medium heat, and ladle finished sauce over cooked linguini.

The linguini is best cooked *al dente*, or firm and pleasing to the teeth, in relatively heavily salted water with a splash of olive oil in it. Drain thoroughly. About one pound of linguini, perhaps a bit more, will do for the sauce quantity described. Bon appetit!

Warning: At this point, you have just assembled and ingested a critical mass of garlic, which will yield predictable results; you will stink to high heaven for a day or so, emitting unimaginable stench from all quarters. In the name of decency, don't circulate among those that'll notice, or if you must, offend someone that needs offending. Share a gut-

ter and a bottle of Ripple with a dying wino, or go have a long lunch across a short table with your local B.A.T.F. agent.

Ciao!

¶

– EDUARDO



## BARTS

*Cælo tonantem credidimus Jovem regnare.*

– HORACE, *Od.* III, v, 1.

Remember a backyard game of the '70s called "Jarts," which was short for Javelin Darts? "Barts" are very similar in appearance. Like all fun games, Jarts were eventually banned because the Safety Fakers' Board (SFB could stand for something else) spoke the famous words (all together now) "You *can't* do that, it's too DANGEROUS!" The nanny state triumphed again. However, the game can still be played safely using a little common sense, and is even more amusing with an added pyrotechnic twist.

Since I didn't want the reputation of being a mere fuse-lighter, the Bomb Dart (or "bart" for short) was a perfect solution – a few household items (at least in a pyrotechnist's household), easily assembled, brought it to realization. Needed are a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " inside diameter paper tube, a spent 20-bore cartridge, a battery cup primer, the pyrotechnic composition of your choice, chipboard, paper, wood for plugs, and adhesives. The 20-bore cartridge is de-capped and the new primer pressed into place. The plastic or paper portion of the cartridge is cut down to the edge of the brass. The resultant primed brass portion is seated in one end of the paper tube, the rim of the cartridge firmly abutting the edge of the tube. Should it not fit snugly enough, the brass may be built up with a strip of paper. The tube, thus closed on one end, is filled with flash powder – or whatever – and closed on the other end with a wooden or paper plug. Three stabilizing fins are made of chipboard and glued on this, the solidly plugged end of the tube.

Another wooden plug, the size of the tube's outside diameter, is cut for the primed end of the tube, and a hole drilled through the center of it to accommodate a nail that fits snugly in the hole and is a little longer than the plug. This plug is affixed to the end of the tube, using a strip of pasted paper, so that the hole is aligned with the shotshell primer. The "bart" is completed by tying or taping the nail to its side (so it can be safely handled until the moment before "showtime," when it is inserted in the hole of the plug).

When I had completed my first "bart," I carefully put the nail in place and proceeded with its delivery. As the "bart" sailed through the air, gracefully arcing toward the pavement, I said "I think I have become death." BOOM!!! The evidence was gone, and I didn't hang around too long either. No more matches, no more lighter, and no need to cuss about the wind. Although I will not go into any jiggery-pokery details, I will say that it is not a good idea to build one any bigger than the limitations of a safe distance at which it can be thrown. A barricade of some kind is recommended, since we don't know which way the brass case head or the nail ends up going. The barricades I have used so far include a log, a tree stump, a Volvo, a ditch (big enough for a Volvo), and a German Shepherd named Lucky. *Chacun à son goût.*

Other things to try in similar configuration are whistling chasers, smoke bombs, delay stink bombs, thermite, or "H.E." Have fun with "barts" at your next party. In the immortal words: "This was tested, it is effective."

PAUL VERONNE



## POLITICALLY INCORRECT FIREWORKS

It is official. *The Case Former* has, as you have read on this issue's front page, been censured for *political incorrectness* in publishing the article "Flaming Justice." Mr. Mountbank Witless leads the politically-correct brigade within the P.G.I.

Political correctness, for those yet blissfully ignorant of it, is one of the more baneful cultural phenomena of the late twentieth century. It is based upon the theory that the civilized world (the politically correct would say, "so called" civilized world") has been evilly dominated by a white, Eurocentric, "phallogocentric" (yes, that's the word they use) racist, sexist, conspiracy to victimize everyone who does not belong to its ranks.

The "P.C." brigade now has a considerable following, being essentially comprised of the folk who were burning flags, breaking the windows of R.O.T.C. buildings, and defecating in the filing cabinets of deans' offices back in the 'sixties. These people have come, twenty-some years later, into positions of considerable influence in the word-manipulating professions of academia, journalism, and government.

Now, America has, within most living memory, been a place pretty callous and case-hardened about general insult. This is attributable to the disap-

pearance of such old-time institutions as the duel, tarring-and-feathering, riding out of town on a rail, and the common practice of decent people (as opposed to criminals) going about armed. These were powerful influences in favor of civility. But - while you can feel free to insult anyone not a member of a Certified Victim Group, your speech and writing will be thoroughly vetted, these days, by the "P.C." enforcers; and whatever smidgen of offense a Victim of Society could possibly take, they assure *will* be taken, be it only from an inadvertency, a passing remark, or a glance askance. You will then know such misery as one might have endured upon being accused of heresy in sixteenth-century Madrid or Geneva, or perhaps today if one opened up a pork chop stand in downtown Riyadh.

The writer recalls a celebrated sports broadcaster of his youth who used to exclaim "Holy Moses!" when, during the course of his commentary, something particularly exciting (like a home run or a double play) took place. This continued until a number of Jewish listeners complained to the radio station that this was an inappropriate use of their great prophet's name. Obliging, the sportscaster began to exclaim "Holy cow!" in its place. Were the poor man still alive and working today, how long do you suppose it would be before he was upbraided for being offensive to the Hindus? It will not be long, I predict, before polite persons will have to say that their visit to the bathing beach resulted in an infestation of *chegroes* (or perhaps *parasites of color*).

But let us not grow weary in well-doing! Remember that the American Revolution was a fairly politically incorrect occasion. It was fomented, after all, by country gentlemen (many of whom owned slaves) against a bureaucratic central power that sought to impose higher taxes and more stringent regulations. The Party of Nicey-Nice, good socialists all, might probably have held their noses at an alliance with a monarch like George III, but the promise of higher taxes and more stringent regulations ultimately would have won them over to his side.

So, for your delectation, and the inspiration of our Class "C" importer members, we offer the following proposed firework brand names with which you can celebrate the Fourth in a politically-incorrect manner:

1. Drunken Nigger brand
2. Max Orgasm roman candles
3. D-Cup double cone fountains
4. A Fool and His Money firecrackers
5. Thunderfarce Jackass brand
6. No P.C. brand
7. Hazardous Waste brand
8. Hiroshima multi-tube display (by the people who brought you Pearl Harbor)

9. Civil Servant firecrackers – they won't work and you can't fire 'em.
10. P.G.I. crackers – twice the price of anything else.
11. Girl of the Month crackers
12. Liberal fireworks – they don't whistle, they just whine a lot and emit a weak pink flame.
13. Burnt Lips cigarette loads
14. P.G.I. Safety Committee crackers – guaranteed *not* to work
15. Radioactive Brand
16. LaCrosse Convention Host crackers – who knows when they will go off – you just keep paying for them.
17. Ma Pimentel's cookies – old favorites we haven't seen in years
18. Chappaquiddick water fireworks – "swimmingly good"

Devising more of these names is easy and good fun. Feel free to submit your suggestions for publication in a future *Case Former*.

Just as I was agonizing over what America was coming to, and why the whiners and the "proctoliberals" (as an eminent physician of my acquaintance calls them) now dictate public opinion; what happened to brilliance, eloquence, and witty invective in public speaking; what happened to common sense; even what happened to the good, old-fashioned dirty joke; along came a breath of fresh air. The above list, I hasten to assure you, is strictly a theoretical one, and Mr. Mountebank Witless can put it in his pipe and smoke it for aught I care. However, in real, living, glossy, four-color printing someone handed me a catalogue of fireworks sold by a Finnish merchant. They were mostly "C" although on one page there was a picture of a fellow dressed like a *mafioso*, with slicked down hair and dark glasses, holding two cylinder shells complete with decorative wrap. But it was on the page next to the items for children's birthday parties that I saw my new favorite item.

It was entitled the *Lust Bombe*. Now, I don't know what this sucker does, but on the outside was a beautiful, scantily-clad Finnish girl in black stockings, black garter belt, and high heels, smiling whimsically at your humble scribe, as if to say, "come buy me, shoot me, use me, big boy. I'm yours, put me on your desk and piss off all those old bitches you work with. I'll really put out for you, erupting again and again..."

There is yet hope for pyrotechny. Just the thing for a little kid's birthday party. I think I'll order a couple of cases today.

PAOLO DA GIRO

## MALICE AMONGST THE FUSE-CUTTERS

The LaCrosse 1991 convention was eagerly awaited by your humble scribe – after all, where else can you drink a beer with old friends and shoot and see good fireworks? Unhappily, this was not what I found. The convention might best be summarized by the question, "where was (or were) the..." filling in the balance from the list below:

Prime rib at the banquet? (We got the old Army favorite, "shit on a shingle," but without the shingle)

Special viewing area for P.G.I. members?

Bleachers or chairs?

Fence on the Friday night display?

24" shell (shot without announcement)?

Main convention headquarters?

64 magnum salutes?

Class "C" *stolen* from the "safe" magazine?

Food at the Afterglow parties?

Cardinal's passport?

Senior statesman of American pyrotechnics, Bob Pimentel?

Ma Pimentel's cookies?

Ground competition?

Honor and decency?

You may guess from all of the above that the LaCrosse Thunderfarce was not the smoothest-run convention I have ever attended. I wonder if the mysteriously scarce chairman was too busy superintending his various schemes/scams to care about the P.G.I.I. convention-goer. A wise man once said never to write a check with your mouth that your ass can't cover. 'Nuff said! Let me add that some of the nicest people I have ever met were LaCrosse citizens; I just wonder why they were not involved with the convention.

What I did find at the convention:

Old friends

The Cosmic Destroyer

A great rocket/ground-bomb string

OOGLE-OOGLE

Brilliant blue stars

The Casino Bar and Lounge, especially Denise Rasmussen, the bartender

Satan Ale

The Cardinal

FUSE-CUTTERS

Yes, the P.G.I.I. has been taken over by the Fuse-Cutters!

Monday night saw the shooting of the first, and hopefully annual, ready-box competition. We as craftsmen would like to propose this as an annual event. It is most illuminating how the safety-fakers scream about being careful and then manage to drop sparks in their ready-boxes. In our twenty years of display operation we have never done this. Perhaps we should be careful and start doing this! One, two, load and fire your ready-boxes!



The safety-fakers then built an amazing new ready-coffin. A large P.G.I. member was found sleeping in it the next day. He said, "well, it's as comfortable as my bed at the Holiday Inn, but the Holiday Inn is cheaper by the night."

Watching the rocket-bomb competition, I noticed a strange occurrence. People were holding lit cigarettes in one hand and rockets in the other. When a nearby safety-faker was informed of this fact, he said, "Ah, hell, this vest don't mean shit, we should all be safe and insane! I won't tell them to stop lighting up." I left, thinking only that at least if one was going to smoke while shooting fireworks, a nice cigar would be far preferable.

That night I sojourned to the gala cheese fête, and watched the Afterglow in full swing. Never had I seen such a collection of safety-fakers and fuse-cutters. The first such I met tried to explain to me how he was going to manufacture Class "C" fireworks "cheaper than the Chinese." He especially wanted to make multi-tube items ("birthday cakes") as he was sure he could make them cheaper, better and faster. I leave to you to assess the level of his practicality and business judgment.

The second worthy tried to explain to me how to string shells. I has mentioned that my fingers were cut up by the Fourth from tying knots. He suggested that I buy a pair of baling gloves and cut off the fingers as they would protect my palms. Of course it would continue to leave my poor cut fingers exposed to the string.

The third one wanted me to tell him the secret code words to say to an old-time firework craftsman, so that he might receive from him all the secrets of the trade and be called brother, friend, and pal. I told him the secret word was *work*. If you work hard enough and long enough, you'll find out what you need. He wandered away in a daze to seek out the quick-fix and Scotch tape boys. I hope they ate him alive on a stick.

During the ensuing week, I met more folk of this character - could something in the water have caused them to change? Even the poor Cardinal, visitor to our shores, was not spared the unceasing ravages of barbarous force. During one day's set-up, an officer approached him, seized a can of beer from his hand, berated him, and poured it out! Now, no explosives were present - why can't someone, working outdoors, without pay, on his vacation, enjoy a beer? Would the beer pourer have tried this on someone larger than himself, or is he just a craven coward? Had he tried it on me, he would had to visit a proctologist to have the can removed from where I placed it.

The capstone to the whole week was put in place the Saturday following the convention. I met the fuse-cutter. It happened like this. I was walking across the park when I saw three people bent over

a box. I asked them what they were doing. "Looking for duds," said one of them. "Find many?" I asked. "Can't tell," he said, then he pointed to his Sky Rocketeers baseball cap and said, "I work with these things, so I know what they are! But, I wonder which ones are live?"

I looked at the mixture of spent and un-ignited go-getters they had picked up, and said, "With these, it's easy. You have a cap on the bottom, and a piece of black match on top, if it's still live." He looked at it confusedly and said, "Which is the top and which is the bottom?" Showing him the go-getter I pointed my finger to demonstrate which was the matched end, and which was the plugged one. "No need to explain," he said, touching his hat, "I'm a member of the Sky Rocketeers."

I began to separate live objects from spent casings. After a while I saw an amazing thing. This great jerk had produced a wire-stripper and was busily cutting off the protruding match from a number of the live go-getters. "What are you doing?" I asked. "Making them safe," he chortled. Never mind that the tube is still full of composition and could be lit at any second. When Mr. Fireworks Expert cut off the match, the device was safe.

I took the box away from him and told him I had a safe place to dispose of them. Many of you may remember them from the bonfire at Shaggy's later that night.

If you are ever at a pyrotechnic gathering and you meet such a combination of arrogance and ignorance, take pity on your fellow I.O.O.J. companions and introduce him as a Champion Fuse-Cutter. This way we will know him for what he is without your having explicitly to identify him as such.

PAOLO DA GIRO



## DUE AND TIMELY NOTICE

Those of you who have been companions of the I.O.O.J. and readers of *The Case Former* in the past know that this is an Order in which a good amount of levity may be expected, and precious little is published here that does not contain a dose of humor, or is not (at least) laden with cruel sarcasm. A time comes, however, when it is necessary to be absolutely serious, and this is such a time.

Our advice to those wishing to make fireworks, whether as a hobby or as a business, has always been to *get a federal explosives license*. If the money, space, and time to do all the necessary things

- buy or lease land, build a magazine, fill out forms, pay fees, submit to inspections, and maintain records - are not, for some reason, available, then find a sympathetic licensee who will let you work on his premises and under his license (at least for record-keeping purposes). Recognizing the wide variation in state and local regulatory conditions, we admit that staying completely legal may be vastly more expensive and difficult in some places than in others. Nonetheless, it is about the only way to be sure one will not face some very nasty consequences.

We are aware of various arguments that have been made to the effect that amateurs not making fireworks for sale or trade are not "engaged in the business of... manufacturing... explosive materials" under the meaning of federal law, and accordingly do not need to be licensed. This is a slender reed to lean on, and one we doubt will mean very much when law-enforcement authorities swoop down on your unlicensed firework shop. It will have to be argued in court, and even if you win you will have been through a costly and horrifying experience.

The amateur firework-maker is especially vulnerable to police action and prosecution. Unlike the skilled firework bootlegger, he is not well-financed and well-concealed. Law enforcement officials have the same human nature the rest of us do, and like everyone else they would rather do what is easy and safe than what is risky and difficult. Unlicensed amateur pyrotechnists are fish in a barrel, waiting to be shot. They often take the fall for law enforcement's failure to detect large bootlegging operations or regulatory violations by legitimate operators who have subsequently had accidents. This writer is familiar with two cases in which unlicensed amateurs, "busted" with exemplary rigor, seemed to bear the brunt of the B.A.T.F.'s frustration at having failed to catch nearby and recent violations of much more significant character. One unlicensed amateur suffered because a substantial M-80 bootlegging business had flourished for years in the same federal judicial district, undetected, until its clandestine factory spectacularly blew up. The B.A.T.F. used this unfortunate amateur to wipe away the egg that had copiously besplattered its face in that case. A group of unlicensed amateurs were raided in Texas, their handful of handmade cylinder shells confiscated and blown up in the desert, and all haled into federal court, within weeks after the celebrated Aerlex explosion in Oklahoma (part of the same federal judicial district). A B.A.T.F. official, summoned to testify before Congress as to how his agency could have let so large an operation as Aerlex be managed unsafely under its regulatory purview, offered in expiation of this alleged "neglect" that, well, his

agents *had* just shut down a "major illegal manufacturing operation" in the same area.

The unlicensed amateur's case before any court will depend upon subtle distinctions to which, as we've said, law enforcement authorities and courts are unlikely to pay much attention. If any doubt remains as to their indifference to these very distinctions, consider an article that just appeared in *The Detonator* (Vol. 19, No. 1, January/February 1992 issue) entitled "Expert Witness Pitfalls." This article advises bomb squad personnel and prosecutors who may be involved in amateur-fireworks cases how to gloss over these subtleties and *get convictions!* We quote some of this advice:

"...(S)everal potential pitfalls come to mind...Often these problems go unchallenged and do not result in a lost conviction [*sic*]; never the less [*sic*], when the defense is highly motivated and well prepared, these can and do result in inappropriate conviction [*sic*] losses...When you testify, you need to carefully [*sic*] choose the words you use. Too often technical words are used, which help little or not at all, but may on occasion be turned to the advantage of the defense."

Specific examples follow. Here are a couple of pointers for the successful prosecutor of amateur pyrotechnists:

"Even many of the words and terms which you know very well can get you into trouble. As an example, consider 'Flash Powder.' If you declare a pyrotechnic composition as being flash powder, you should be prepared to defend that declaration. Of course, you can offer a credible definition of flash powder; however, a well prepared defense attorney can probably still give you trouble. First he will get you to declare a high degree of certainty in your proclamation regarding the composition being flash powder. (If you do not, you will already have lost, the jury will fault you for declaring it to be flash powder for the prosecution, but admit [*sic*] uncertainty to the defense attorney.) He may then ask you if you are familiar with a few of the most well-known texts on pyrotechnics and fireworks. Then he could hand you a sheet of paper listing perhaps ten 'well known' published fireworks formulations and ask you to identify, which, if any, are flash powder formulations. You may think you will do well, but the chances are slim that you will get most correct. There are many strange formulations for flash powder, and today about half of all fireworks formulations contain metal powders, mostly aluminum. To someone unfamiliar with details of fireworks compositions, many that are not flash powder will appear to be so, and vice versa. When you don't score perfectly, the defense attorney will

encourage the jury to question your ability to identify flash powder formulations with certainty.

"...(D)eclaring the composition to be flash powder, probably benefits the case very little at all. Thus it would be better to identify the material as, for example, a potassium chlorate explosive. In doing that, nothing is lost, and there will not be an opportunity for the defense to challenge your credibility.

"...(E)ven the terms like M-80, M-200, etc. should be avoided in testimony...To the jury, what is an M-80, just a big firecracker? Then what is an M-200, a bigger firecracker? Thus, the jury, guided by the defense attorney, may see the matter as the prosecution asking for a felony conviction for the defendant merely selling a few large firecrackers? The problem is easily avoided by calling such items 'explosive devices.'

"Some of the words and terms to avoid and some suggested alternatives are listed... If the prosecution's case is strong enough and it has been correctly charged, occasional problems resulting from the use of these terms generally will not cause it to be lost. However, when a case has some weaknesses, possibly not yet recognized by the prosecuting attorney or his experts, the case can seriously and needlessly threatened [*sic*]."

The above excerpts should give the amateur pyrotechnist an idea how his activities will be described in court. His colored star compositions will be described as "potassium chlorate explosives," his handmade aerial shells as "explosive devices." Can't have the defense attorney playing upon the gullible jury's sympathies by describing them as mere "fireworks". If he was allowed to do that, the case might become an "inappropriate convection [*sic*] loss."

Some of our readers may have guessed already from the style of the above excerpts, complete with reproduced illiteracies (the split infinitive is almost a signature), that the authors of this useful prosecution advice are K.L. and B.J. Kosanke.

The Kosankes, prominent P.G.I. insiders, are among the most significant suppliers of chemicals, paper tubes, fuses and other pyrotechnic sundries to the unlicensed amateur firework makers of America. We shall refrain from any speculation about their motives in publishing advice intended to help those who would, if they could, show "zero tolerance" for hobby pyrotechnics. Just remember that you heard it here first.

Forewarned is forearmed!

ERNST PFANTODT



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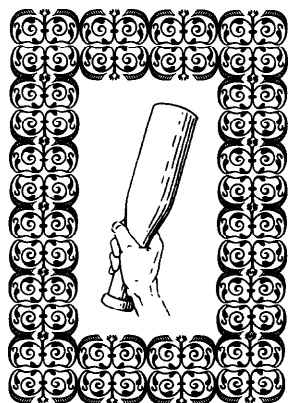
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# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et praevalabit.” – I. *Esdra*s, iij: 41.

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NO. 1.

## ALLOCUTION OF THE RT. VEN. BIANCO GASOLINI, G.:C.:

‘Απαξ λεγόμενον.

Hello all – I realize that you haven’t heard from old Bianco in a while. Most of you know that I changed homes – that’s right, I have carried the fight for truth and tradition in fireworks back to my old home in Thunderland. It always seems to be an uphill battle – somehow, many of the locals have been convinced that the Convention, or some semblance thereof, will be held here again in the foreseeable future. Otherwise, life here is fairly placid, with many opportunities to make new friends and renew old associations.

I understand this fine publication has come under attack again – this time during the usual hag-gling over the *Pyrotechnica* honorarium which has become an annual event at P.G.I.I. conventions. It is rather surprising that certain individuals have chosen to assume that these two periodicals are related. While it is flattering that such eminent figures as our beloved A.P.A. historian have placed us on the same plane as the most highly respected journal in pyrotechny today, I can assure one and all that *The Case-Former* is an entirely independent effort, with its own contributors and editorial staff. It is also a group project, not the work of a single individual, as has also been alleged. Anyone with a semi-literate mind should recognize the diversity of writing styles and subject matter as the efforts of various contributors instead of that of a single author.

I do have a few words of advice for those readers of *The Case-Former* who are not on our subscription list. Occasionally I will receive published materials from organizations that take positions on issues which are opposed to my own (i.e., Greenpeace, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Democratic Party, and various other crackpots). These publications find themselves in the trash as soon as I pick them out of the mail. I know that the result of my reading this crap will be my own infuriation, so I don’t do it – it’s really that simple.

In an unfortunate turn of events, it was impossible to hold the annual I.O.O.J. party at “Shaggy’s” as previously planned. Instead it was held at Goose Island Park, just outside LaCrosse, the evening of October 17. Although the weather was cold, the bonfire warmed us; the fireworks were good, and a fair number of new companions were inducted in ample form. We look forward to another such occasion next year, possibly in the Spring. Until next time, may Vulcan smile down upon us all! ☿

BIANCO GASOLINI

## A MATTER OF PRINCIPAL

*Ars longa, vita brevis.*

—HIPPOCRATES

Adolescence has historically been a troubled time for young people, particularly in the latter part of this century. Trouble is an apt word to use in describing the high school careers of Stephano and myself, for we lived it and breathed it in every waking moment of our early adult lives, which some might say continue on to this day.

Trouble comes in many forms; some choose fist-fights, fast cars, fast girls, and chemical abuse to satisfy these insurrective needs. Such endeavors are all well and good, and certainly were not neglected by us, but they are all rather trite, don’t you think? Stephano and I chose to lean heavily on pyrotechnics as a vehicle directed toward the outrage, humiliation, and free-floating anxiety of our elders and community as a whole. As any citizen of Beirut or Dublin will tell you, the occasional random blast leaves deep psychological furrows, if not outright voids, and with this intuitive knowledge in hand, we set about our work.

Back in the early 70’s (and for all I know, to this day), fireworks were sold openly to anyone with the cash to buy them, entirely illegally of course, in Boston’s Haymarket Square. Haymarket is a

section of Boston's North End which is heavily Italian, there being row upon row of gaudy, colorful, and fragrant open-air markets and fruit vendors' carts along the northern end of the Southeast Expressway, a notorious traffic horror. In this neighborhood, where Italian is still the language of choice, one can tour block after maze-like block of ancient homes, apartments, and shops, where the best language, save Italian, is a genuine, accepting smile, and the worst sin an air of arrogance or condescension.

Into this morass Stephano and I waded, through the foreign, confusing neighborhoods, until we got to the playground. The playground is a section of basketball courts and jungle-gyms, graffiti ablaze from its ancient walls, where the Old Man sits. He is a grizzled, pot-bellied, morose fellow, clad always in a dirty white T-shirt, chewing perpetually on what he must believe to be a cigar. Sometimes it really emits smoke, but mostly he just sort of gnaws it, a vile brown foam about his lips.

We would stammer out our fireworks orders to the Old Man, and he would snap his fingers once our cash was in his hand. Then an urchin would appear, a brief conversation in Italian ensuing, and the kid would vanish into the labyrinth of alleys and tenements. Although Stephano and I tried mightily to pry some morsel of comradeship from the Old Man, he would rarely discuss even the weather with us, his conversation confined to a few terse grunts.

In a few minutes the kid would reappear with the trademark of our business; two grocery bags inverted upon one another, which was enough to conceal our 12 oz. rockets and roman candles. It was funny how many people on the subway train back to the 'burbs cradled such packages. Knowing smiles were exchanged with these pilgrims, but rarely conversation.

During those days, M-80's were sold for \$14.00/gross through Haymarket. They were very capable devices, made by professionals, and they packed a horrendous punch. Quarter sticks, roughly three times an M-80's power, were also sold occasionally, and on one fine day Stephano and I acquired a couple dozen.

Our high school was a perfect target for such mischief. There were crowds of kids milling around endlessly, smoking cigarettes between each class, and before and after school. It was pitifully easy to light a Marlboro, tear off the filter, and impale the cigarette upon the fuse of a quarter stick or M-80, then amble away after placing the thing in, say, a dumpster, trash can, hallway locker, lavatory, or best yet, in the courtyard, where the racket was merciless, and eloquent when timed to explode during morning announcements. Terrorism was ours far before the I.R.A. and Hezbolla made it fashionable.

Life was good that spring, when girls, booze, dope, and fireworks were all plentiful. Yet I knew things were headed for a fall, since I hadn't been to class for a couple of weeks, having found higher pursuits in the aforementioned areas.

The expected fall came one morning just before home room, as Stephano and I, intent upon testing the structural strength of the school's plumbing, headed up to the third floor boys' lavatory with a quarter stick. We were curious as to how far such a device, flushed down a toilet, might travel before exploding. We were imbued with a deep sense of purpose, having had for breakfast a handful of percodans and a couple of quarts of Ballantine Ale. . . . Breakfast of Champions.

As we rounded the corridor corner, I ran directly into Richard (known to us as Rico) Carbone, the school principal. I heard a shuffle behind me and realized that Stephano had seen Rico first and split. Before I knew it, a meaty hand had me by the shoulder.

I understood that this was curtains; almost certain expulsion. It was not wholly unexpected, however. With my buzz and integrity intact, I marched down the hall, head high, as Robespierre might have, to meet my end. Once in his office, Rico sat me down in a straightbacked, armless chair, where so many students had poured sweat before him. It suited me fine; I expected no mercy.

Rico's desk faced me from the front of the building, ground level. His back was toward the window, as only a clod like him might arrange things. I faced the window, and looked out over his shoulder at the cul-de-sac of Rice Street, where the school busses loaded and unloaded, and beyond it, the soccer field.

"Mr. Tellerini," he began, "It's so good that we've found this opportunity to speak this morning."

A hint of a smile curled one lip. I returned it with as arrogant a gallows sneer as I could muster.

Mrs. Coughlin walked in, handing Rico the summary of my missed classes, outright trancies, and other myriad transgressions. He mused through it for a moment, and said, "Eduardo, it's obvious that you have no intention at all of pursuing your education to any meaningful end."

I sighed, shrugged, and glared at him, which was when I saw the smoke. A thin column of smoke drifted lazily up from the outer windowsill behind Rico's back. For a moment I pondered this, wondering who the hell smokes cigarettes just outside the principal's office window, and I came up empty. This troubled me vaguely.

"In view of your blatant attitudinal problems, Mr. Tellerini, I have no choice but to. . .

From there Rico's words were lost, fading away, for far away, far across the cul-de-sac, far across Rice Street, and even across the soccer field, a flash of movement caught my attention. I refocussed my

eyes and saw a form, curly long blond hair flying, leather fringe coat flailing, dancing and capering at the edge of the lush green woods that led to the soccer field. The figure had a green quart bottle in its hand, and I watched while it began to offload a bladderfull of used beer, and then I understood.

In one nauseating, dizzying, moment of spinning horror I understood everything. I knew that I was seeing Stephano out there, and I knew what the smoke meant. It meant that there was a quarter stick, with a cigarette fuse attached to it, sitting quietly on Rico's windowsill, just beyond my view. I stretched a bit in my chair and my heart sank. I saw the tip of a cigarette ash, and wondered vaguely if Robespierre had felt like *this*.

I glanced back as Rico, and saw him smiling. I couldn't think of why he might do that, and then I considered myself. I was sitting bolt upright in terror, leaning forward slightly, eyes bulging, jaws grinding, fists clenched, and looking like a man locked in mortal combat with terrible constipation.

Rico was enjoying this. He obviously thought he had scared me into near panic with his threat of expulsion. A moment later the miserable truth of the situation dawned on me; Carbone was going to keep me here as long as he wished, just to watch me squirm. And sooner or later, those Marlboro minutes would run out. If I was still around at that time, I'd be picking glass out of my face.

With Herculean effort I loosened my jaws, relaxed my fists, and leaned back as far as one could in that damned chair. A lock of shoulder-length hair flopped over one eye, and I worked fiercely to crank out that go-to-hell sneer that I had so often fixed upon Rico. It was the only way to end his fun and get out before the place blew. It occurred to me for a moment to tell Rico that we were about to eat some glass, but I just couldn't. Despite the grave situation that Stephano had placed us in, it was still rather funny.

Finally, I offered, "Mr. C., I'll be on my way, and withdraw from school rather than get expelled, just like last year, if that's OK with you."

I waited a split second, without reply, and said, "Great. Thanks, Mr. C., see ya 'round."

As I arose from my chair to leave, further motion from outside caught my eye. This time it was a more intense plume of smoke, and as I hurried through the door to Mrs. Coughlin's office, I knew that the two inches of Visco-type fuse had ignited, and I had scant seconds to get clear of the blast zone.

I saw Rico begin to rise from his desk just as I closed his office door. Perhaps he had more to say to me, I really don't know. As I made eye contact with Mrs. Coughlin, the school secretary, I saw the flash. It was a gray, overcast day to begin with, and the cloud cover made the most of what was truly an impressive explosion. Three out a perhaps

a dozen of Mrs. Coughlin's windows cracked or shattered, and even I was concerned about Rico.

Not to fear, though. Rico lurched through the door a moment later, white smoke pouring after him, looking for all the world as though he'd tried to shave half his face with a straight-razor and a raging case of the D.T.'s. Blood rivulets ran from several small wounds, and his mirthless grin and strangely dark eyes told me that he was dancing along the edge of homicide, hysteria, or perhaps both. His suitcoat and hair were sequined with sparkling shards of broken glass, and he glared at me like a lunatic Liberace. I excused myself very quickly and went to find Stephano, who, having had second thoughts about his idea, had returned to try to disarm his invention. Not in time, though.

After a few more percodans and beers, it all seemed to fall into perspective, as things so often do when viewed thusly, and we laughed until we cried and damned near peed our pants.

Still, I wonder whatever possessed Stephano to blow up the high school office.

"It was, after all, a matter of principal," Stephano answered. ¶

EDUARDO TELLERINI



## THE LITERARY FRONT

*Habent sua fata libelli.*

—TERENTIANUS MAURUS

A Review of *Fire, Flash and Fury: The Greatest Explosions of History*. By Ragnar Benson. (published by Paladin Press, P.O. Box 1307, Boulder, Colorado 80306).

Ragnar Benson's works are less well known in the circles of serious pyrotechnists than those of mad bombers and rogue chemists, yet since our ranks are well represented in this constituency, it would be remiss of this writer to omit mention of a very fine book in a series of fine books, by an author that is obviously a kindred spirit. Excerpts from his preface say it all:

"There are those among us to whom the smell of powder and the feel of the blast have become an addiction. The sense of elation in a high-explosive situation is difficult for most people to articulate. On close questioning, most addicts will admit that this attraction to an earth-rending explosion is completely irrational..."

"Most regular people don't understand – much less appreciate – us addicts. Some folks can't

even imagine what we're high on. The ultimate high occurred almost twenty years ago, on December 23rd, 1969, in a little village called Moscow, Idaho, where I was visiting my daughter. Some dear soul managed to touch off twenty thousand pounds of ammonium nitrate all in one shot. I was walking down Main Street when the concussion cracked all the west-facing windows. It was truly wonderful."

Benson's book describes in loving detail the most cataclysmic blasts he could chronicle throughout history, from the Krakatoa volcanic blast of 1883, through Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1984, and all the points between. Beautifully pictorialized with vast rubble and carnage, this book is an absolute must for the true aficionado of apocalyptic explosions.

Some of the events covered are:

Krakatoa, estimated conservatively at a yield of ten thousand megatons. Benson describes recorded observations and global effects.

Oppau, Germany, where in 1921, some genius decided to loosen up two thousand tons of ammonium nitrate, caked through deliquescence, with charges of dynamite.

Texas City, Texas, 1947, where and when a freighter loaded with ammonium nitrate fertilizer caught fire and detonated, with 3.2 million pounds aboard.

Novaya Zemlya Islands, U.S.S.R., 1961. The Soviet Union, in one of the more artistic moments of the cold war, detonated a 57 megaton thermonuclear open-air blast.

In all Benson describes twenty monstrous blasts, with the kind wit and intimate care of one that is hopelessly in love with vast megatonnage. His style of writing is dryly amusing throughout, and his attitude toward his subject matter an inspiration to his fellow addicts. ☞

EDUARDO TELLERINI

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## THE MALEVOLENT ARTIFICER

Ah – summer, July, and fireworks. One of the parts of any midwestern summer (especially at firework display sites) is the woodtick. These repulsive bloodsuckers remind me of the average liberal politician.

Our new shell this time is the "Wellstone," or woodtick shell. Making the shell itself is the easy part; roll up the case with a liner, fill and finish with light spiking and pasting as in a daylight parachute shell. The hard part is getting the ticks.

Ticks prefer tall grass for a domicile, where they can lay in wait until a host walks by, and hitch a ride. Now, you could strip down to your nylon

bikini undies and walk through the grass, then pick. Not exactly my cup of tea. The method I recommend is to pick up a dog, preferably a poodle, from the pound. Shave it bare, except for the puff of hair on his tail. Spraypaint this puff of hair blaze orange, so as to assist in keeping track of the dog. Bring the dog, a ball, a bedsheet, a container, and a paint-stirring stick to tick country. Throw the ball into the tall grass for the dog to retrieve. After you have done this for a bit you will find enough ticks have accumulated on the dog that you can scrape them off him, using the paint-stirrer, onto the bedsheet; collect them in the container. When you have several thousand you can fill a four-inch shell.

These shells are best fired upwind of the audience at Juneteenth celebrations, or riots, whichever term you prefer. It is so nice to have all the parasites (urban or rural, that is) in one spot.

So that's it for now – keep thinking! ☞

MILANO GIANSLAVI

---

## THE YOUNG PYROS VS. JOHN LAW

*Never tell a copper nuttin'.*

—MILANO

One summer evening in June, the young pyro of the house says, "Milano, can my friends and I make some noise?"

"Sure, boys, but not too much," Milano answered.

A short time later, over the gentle reports of cracker bombs, the war department arrives, and says, "I suppose you gave those boys permission to shoot off all those fireworks! What if the police show up?"

"Well, dear" I said, "they are clever boys. They only need a little advice from old Milano to get along quite well."

A few minutes later, Milano's open-air university is holding class in police science. "Boys, you have to learn how to handle Officer Unfriendly. It's part of growing up. The first rule is, Never tell a copper nuttin'. Next rule, Always split your stash; last rule, Cook up a story beforehand."

Following my advice, the boys split the goods into four lunch bags and hid three of them about the garage. Then they returned to pyro fun. Milano went back to his Michelob. After a short while, the war department arrives, irritated. "The police are in the alley with the boys – now what are you going to do?!"

"Nothing," said I; "I taught those boys what they need to know – be quiet and watch." Well, the



boys handled things quite well. They politely told John Law they were only shooting off last year's leftover fireworks, brought back from vacation in the Dakotas.

"Get me a bucket of water now!" John Law said, pulling up his shirt sleeve. About ten bottle rockets took the plunge, followed by a pinch of jumping jacks and a small handful of cracker bombs the lads had unwrapped for some reason. Round and round he stirred, and when the long arm of the law withdrew, the black, gooey mixture of the partly-dissolved cracker bombs was running out between his fingers. The boys snickered and John Law retreated, shaking his paw, which he wiped on his pants before driving off in his squad car.

"Well boys, how did it go?" I asked.

"Great!" they answered. Then they spent several minutes filling me in on all the details. We all better hope John Law washes his hand before heading for the doughnut shop - lots of lead in those cracker bombs.

MILANO GIANSLAVI

(with inspiration from ANTONIO GIANSLAVI)

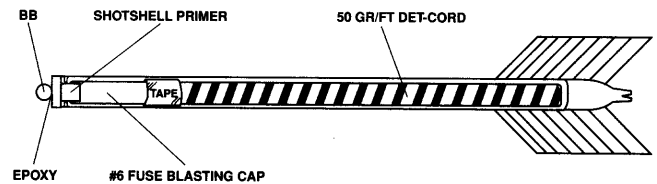


Figure 1. Shotshell Primer, #6 Cap, Det-cord



Figure 2. .38 Cartridge, Flashmix

compound of your choice. After borrowing a yard or so of 50 gr/ft det-cord, a couple #6 fuse blasting caps, and a cup of flash-mix from Eduardo, I got to work. I'll relate a couple of my designs here.

Take a length of det-cord, and stuff it down to the bottom of the hollow arrow, after removing the tip. Then cut the det-cord 1-1/2" short of being flush with the top of the arrow, allowing room for the blasting cap. Next, mate cap with end of det-cord longitudinally, (see diagram) with tape. Into the cap's fuse end, epoxy a shotgun shell primer, and onto the primer's striking surface, epoxy a BB, which acts as a firing pin. Fill in around the det-cord with Bullseye powder, flash-mix, whatever, if there's room. Now CAREFULLY crimp the aluminum body of the arrow around the primer (see Fig. 1). If this is too exciting for you, as it was for me, an alternate priming method is to epoxy your blasting cap into the exact center of a primed .38 special cartridge, and while the epoxy is still malleable, press fit the primed cartridge onto the arrow, *before* epoxying the BB onto the primer. If you don't have access to caps and det-cord, simply fill the arrow with flash-mix, cram on a .38 cartridge, glue on the BB (see Fig. 2), and let 'er rip.

Be warned, however, that the addition of the weight of your payload will substantially reduce the arrow's speed and range. Aim high. Our initial tests bear this out. In our first test, Eduardo and I went down to the tracks and waited for a train, and I launched our first arrow, of the det-cord variety, at a freight car as it passed. That was a sweet little bang. Our second experiment was conducted by our parking behind a copse of trees and lofting a flash-mix arrow into the parking lot of a hardware store. We really should have waited until after business hours, but we were drunk and just couldn't. We beat a hasty retreat after we heard the sirens, and we've always wondered whether they found a scorched

## IMPROVED ARCHERY PROJECTILES

The bow and arrow is as old as time. Even the famed "Ice Man", discovered recently in the Italian Alps, had one, and he is estimated to be several thousand years old.

Today the bow benefits from fiberglass and boron-epoxy construction, as well as the applied methods of mechanical advantage of the cammed compound bow. The wooden arrow has been replaced by hollow aluminum shafts with razor-sharp bear tips; a fearsome and murderous concoction. Yet I felt that pyrotechny had never been properly applied to this device, so I set about bringing the two into union. Primitive efforts have been made to do so in the past, most notable by Cochise and Geronimo with their flaming arrows, and more recently by my brother Eduardo, with a quarter-stick taped to an arrow's tip. (I warned him it wouldn't fly very far or very well, but he just had to try it. Instead of landing in the open field it was intended for, it traced a low, lazy, wobbling arc, skewering the Driscolls' roof. We watched in miserable horror as it sat there, quivering and spitting smoke, until it finally erased several shingles and a small section of plywood. The Driscolls didn't like that, but at least Eduardo learned how to fix roofing, a skill to come in handy later, during our rocketry days.)

A more modern approach is to utilize the arrow's internal capacity, to be filled with the

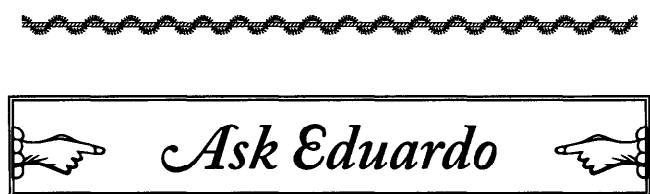
empennage of an arrow, and if they did, what did they make of it?

But hey, it's a big world, with plenty of worthy targets to choose from (I doubt that even Eduardo's dumb enough to let me try the old apple on the head routine). So go to it and have a blast!

WILLIAM TELLERINI

*Footnote: My brother, William, is an accomplished and skilled archer, as well as a hopeless powderhead (it runs in the family). When he brought over this turbo-charged version of the venerable bow and arrow, I was so impressed with his marvelous infernal machine that I prevailed upon him to share it with you. Hope you like it.*

—EDUARDO



*De omni re scibili, et quibusdam aliis.*

—VOLTAIRE

Dear Eduardo,

We were recently greatly disappointed by our bombing of the World Trade Center. We are in deep depression over the fact that our van-bomb blew down, through parking garages, of all the useless things, instead of up, through the lobby and restaurant, as we had intended. What did we do wrong? We feel like such failures. *Please help!*

MOHAMMED SALAMI  
MAHMOUD BULIMIA

Dear Fellows,

Take it easy and don't get so down on yourselves. I can see that you are sensitive perfectionists about your work, but don't be over-critical.

Please realize that yours was a fine first effort, bringing Manhattan to its knees. Give yourselves credit for this, and minimize whatever minor flaws developed, but learn from them.

Remember, rapidly expanding gasses produced by explosives choose the path of least resistance for that expansion and in your case, the garages provided that. If I may make a suggestion, next time try a strategic target which can use the principles of confinement to your advantage. (See *Case Former*, No. 2)

As long as you're in town, perhaps the Holland or Lincoln tunnels would be a useful exercise to enhance your self-esteem.

Remember, no tracable explosives, (ammonium nitrate/fuel oil is my favorite) and simple timers, power transistors, and components from Radio Shack. Above all, *avoid visco fuse!*

Take heart, chin up, get in there and keep on plugging.

EDUARDO

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

*Abyssus abyssum invocat.*

—PSALM xlj:8. (Vulg.)

I started to write what may become an annual feature for the old *Case Former*. When I said I was going to call it "The Year in Review," Herr Pfantodt asked "Did you say "Urine Review?" I said "No, *Year in Review*." He replied, "I though you said Urine Review because you had been talking to the PGI officers. You know how you feel after such an experience - pissed on and pissed off!"

The last year was good for people and bad for fireworks. We had good times and bad weather. New crafts-people appeared, and a few old souls passed. Now, seriously folks, a number of good people either died, moved away, or lost interest and contact, and I won't mention their names as this saddens me. In the true spirit of the I.O.O.J., however, let us commemorate the late Benny Hill. Any guy who likes big hooters can't be half bad. So, Benny, we're going to miss you. And then - line up, guys, here comes Comrade Clinton and his Travellin' Horse Thieves (Democrats, same thing). Drop trousers and moon them, the proper salute for a Democrat. Mourn for our country's lost freedoms.

I did want to mention the passing of two great fireworks animals, Charlie and Ivan. Charlie was a pleasant old tom cat who loved fireworks. He used to watch as we fired test shells, peering intently through the window, usually looking no more than slightly impressed. When we finished he would cock his head as if to say, is that all? Shoot some more, guys.

Ivan, Imbibo's Russian wolfhound, was a true powder-dog. Ivan's favorite trick was to walk into the shell shop, lie down, usually in the middle of the walkway, and fall asleep. We would have to step over or walk around him. Dust and pyrotechnic composition would peacefully drift down upon him. I took bets for a while on what color he would burn if we lit him. Hopefully, not Comrade Clinton's favorite pinko! Ivan had a unique knack for detecting "personality defects." If you could work

around him without disturbing him, fine. If you woke Ivan, however, you were an asshole. Only one creature, to whom I will here refer as "she who must be avoided," ever did in my experience.

Well, so much for the sorrows – now for the joy. Fireworks shows were great. The Lake, the Lake, the Lake, need I say more. Fabulous shells, great low-level devices, a waterfall made from morning glories, cases of Class C in the fire, Jack Daniels in the glass, buzz-bombs in the water, and not a fuse-cutter or safety-faker in sight. Imbibo, where's the *food*? To top it all off, we had "dinner music."

The Duckhunter's shows went off with their usual aplomb. Fireworks in abundance, food in excess, fun in plenitude! I can't say enough about Ducks' shows, certainly a high point not to be missed. But, Ducks, get rid of those cheap, seamed, plastic mortars. Seams belong on ladies' silk stockings. When I can burst a mortar with a modestly-loaded little mine, it's got to be garbage. Did you get those mortars from some charlatan?

Then we had two new events. Putting the last first, in the fall we went to the Hill Country shoot. I hope this will be an annual event, as it was a great time. Brats and lampare, seeing old friends, a hug from Jennifer, Denise Rasmussen announcing she's getting married, and of course, the police.

It happened like this. We were shooting off some small stuff waiting for dinner to end when up pulls the local sheriff. He explains that this is the opening of duck season and people hearing our noise thought that there were hunters lost in the swamp. We would have to stop shooting, permit or no permit, right now! The lady next to me chortled, "He's my brother-in-law. Watch this." She walked up to him, called him by name, and asked why he was ruining everyone's fun.

He looked at her and said, 'Oh, it's you, the fireworks people – carry on.' He had a brat and a Coke and left. May I say, this is a sensible law enforcement. I commend the Hill Country's police department. I hope that the Hill Country boys and girls have us back again. It was a blast. Saw a couple of fabulous shells – shell-of-shells effects to crossettes, perfectly built and timed. Too bad you don't see these in PGI competitions but when you treat the members like dreck, you don't get their best performances.

Earlier, last spring, had been Imbibo's wedding. The show was put on by his friends. The reception featured Jack Daniels and powdered-sugar doughnuts, and Schell's dark for us beer people. The fireworks were remarkable. Ground work unseen or unheard of in years. Lance, wheels, a bishop's cross, walls of swallows, just on and on. And the aerial fireworks were incredible! Large complex multi-breaks, special effects, rarely-seen rockets, and the most amazing finale by Eduardo. Eduardo made

the spider shells go in a circle in the sky. He even did it twice, just to show that it could be done. I've never seen this before, and let me tell you, it was amazing. I'll remember that show forever.

Now, for the flip side. At a dusty, sparsely attended convention, the PGI officers changed. Companion Shy-lift was replaced by the Grand Squirrel Molester. Here is a person who proudly details (in a publication we shall not name) his principal pyrotechnic achievement, an electrically-squibbed booby-trap to discourage squirrels from raiding his birdfeeder. A word of advice: if you're bothered by squirrels, use a twelve-gauge shotgun. One shot, no more problem. Trust me, it really works. At any rate, the G.S.M. joins the ranks of non-fireworks-makers now leading the guild. I do apologize to two of the officers as they are decent, hardworking people who truly care for fireworks and seeing that people have a good time. But seriously – the "Offissary" is not a place for toadies, charlatans, mountebanks, fools and half-wits. That's why we have competition judges, after all!

I'd also like to report that new people came on the scene. People who matter. People who make a difference. People who care about fireworks. This is encouraging.

Well, I still haven't found a Lust-bombe, but I'm a year older and I hope wiser. If you are at the Lake, or Ducks', or Hill Country, or maybe even the PGI Convention, give me a sign, I'll give you its due. We can then spend a while speaking of friends, barbecue, beer, beautiful women, and fireworks. You know, the most important things in life.

Until next time...



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*Recueil choisi des mensonges, plagiaires, singeries & sottises pyrotechniques*, imprimé à Montréal, 1992. ed. Traditore Detestabile \*

\* (NOTE: *This mammoth volume contains such sensational papers as "L'œuvre de M. Wheeze – songe ou mensonge?" delivered at the first annual symposium of the Canadian Authority for Testing Selected Highly Improbable Technologies last spring!*)

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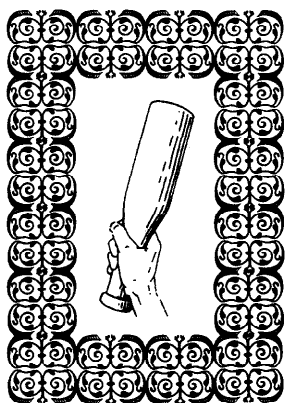
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# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et prævalebít.” – I. *Esdra*s, iij: 41.

VOL. II

OCTOBER, 1993

NO. 2.

## THE DAY THE PIGEONS SHOT BACK

*And I promise you shootinge, by my iudgement,  
is the most honeste pastime of all, and suche one,  
I am sure, of all other, that hindereth learninge  
littel or nothinge at all, whatsoever you and some  
other saye.*

—ROGER ASCHAM, 1544.

Our readers are no doubt familiar with exploding targets, designed for use with rifles and handguns. These devices are relatively simple to construct and need not be dangerously sensitive; in fact one version is commercially available.

Several years ago the author was having tea with Mr. Bertram Q. Whitworth, an enthusiastic shot-gunner and a key member of the local trap club. In the course of conversation the possibility of an exploding clay pigeon was raised. Obviously this was a far different proposition than the stationary targets with their chlorate or perchlorate flash powders. A pellet of #7½ or #8 shot carries much less energy than a .22 caliber bullet or even a fast-moving air rifle projectile. Furthermore, a fractured clay bird offers no anvil surface comparable to the earthen backstops used for rifle shooting. The obvious question was whether a mixture sensitive enough to function reliably would be stable enough to withstand the powerful thrust of the throwing machine – or to be carried in one's bare hands! Nonetheless, Mr. Whitworth felt such a target would be the ideal way to enliven summer practice, and we decided to proceed with the project.

The preliminary experiments involved targets loaded with priming compound only. Each mixture was made into a thin paste with water and dextrin, then generous beads of this slurry were placed around the insides of target domes and allowed to dry. Top secret testing at Whitworth's personal trap-house quickly narrowed our range of choices. Mixtures of chlorate and sulphides, even with catalysts like black oxide of manganese, would not ignite when the targets were hit. Perchlorate of potash with red phosphorus was also tried, with equally

disappointing results. It was evident that of the “normal” pyrotechnic compositions, only the dreaded Armstrong's mixture would suffice.

Clay targets conform to narrow size restrictions but vary in contour; the ones in use had a pronounced step or lip at roughly the middle of their height. Thus it was a simple matter to glue a cardboard disc on this ridge, creating a sealed chamber in the dome of the target. To our delight we found that this modification did not spoil the aerodynamic properties of the saucers.\* The flight of our “birds” showed no detectable difference from that of the factory product. Some of these targets were charged with a mixture of chlorate of potassa, nitrate of baryta and an excess of bright aluminum. Others received salutes, whistles or bright magnesium stars along with a bit of black powder, while a few were simply filled with feathers for the

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\*ED. NOTE.: *The following gloss on the above passage is contributed by Dr. S. Dulcamara, Chirurgéon-General of our Order, who occasionally reviews articles submitted to The Case Former:*

*“The peculiar felicity of Brimstone's selection of words is nowhere more evident than in this pregnant phrase. Is not the choice of ‘saucers’ suggestive? We are aware that there are those on the lunatic fringe (Anticyram navigant!) who allege a connection between fireworks and unidentified flying objects, presumably occupied by little green men with pointed ears. Yet the concept of luminous, burning, or otherwise pyrotechnically charged targets, the simple product of human artifice, is much more logical as an explanation for such phenomena, than is extraterrestrial phantasmagoria. . .*

*“We know that the best training for fighter pilots or anti-aircraft gunners is ‘shooting flying,’ and that the principle of leading or swinging through a flying target is the same whether the target be a clay pigeon, a bird, or an enemy plane. . . all the great aces, from von Richtofen to Yeager, have been devotees of the scattergun. Is it not entirely probable that purported ‘UFOs’ are no more than giant ‘flaming clays’ launched to teach military personnel how to shoot; and in fact, what the government secretly constructs and suppresses publicity about is in fact fireworks, rather than science-fiction creatures as some fabulously suppose?”*

sake of variety. Finally all were carefully stacked in a box, with rags or paper toweling between to prevent these pigeons from quarrelling in their dove-cote.

In order to make our invention more memorable its debut was unannounced. The club is a rather informal one, where members take turns pulling or even setting targets when trap boys are scarce. Thus it attracted no attention when the author and Mr. Whitworth ambled down to the traphouse with an odd lot of targets. There was some trepidation on the part of the perpetrators: what would happen if the box were dropped, or if a hasty pull tripped the arm before the loaders were clear? Also to be considered were irate shooters. Trap is a conservative sport where concentration is at a premium and any breach of protocol can be very disruptive. Mr. Syms, a visiting hotshot, was friendly enough but took his trapshooting very seriously. One of the regulars, a Mr. Blunt, was gruff and short-tempered, but fortunately was a close friend of the author's partner in mischief.

The first choice among victims was clearly O. J. MacNaughton. This affable gentleman was still shooting well, despite being in his 70's, and he was easy-going with a fine sense of humor. He grew up in the 1930's, and between this factor and his ancestry was cautious with his money - some would say tight. Despite his considerable wealth, he scrounged lead to make his own shot, and he used any and all reloading components left over from his chain of sporting-goods stores. In particular he was known for using heavy hunting loads at trap practice, so that shooters three stations away were never safe from his ejected hulls. For variety he might load a few light shot charges over slow AL-7 or AL-8 powder, resulting in "bloopers" or squib loads. In short, fellow shooters never knew what to expect, but could count on something unusual. We determined that MacNaughton had signed up for the fourth station, then chose a flash powder pigeon from our box of surprises.

After the customary sample target, which is not shot, we began counting. Each shooter, including our unsuspecting victim, was allowed one normal bird to establish rhythm. Six - seven - eight - the ninth bird settled very gently on the moving arm, then took flight. O. J. MacNaughton obligingly centered the target, which disappeared with a brilliant flash and a mushroom cloud of gray smoke. This was followed by silence - no cries of "pull", no shooting, no sounds at all except from the surrogate trap boys, who were gasping for breath and trying not to roll on the floor.

After a few suspenseful moments the shooting resumed. A second "special", also intended for MacNaughton, was missed; it sailed lazily over the hill, where its salute exploded with a muffled boom.

CF v2#2 This time, even from our concrete sanctuary, we

could hear muttering. It is highly irregular, and probably against A.T.A. rules, for the targets to return fire!

For the remainder of the round, we loaded our unorthodox pigeons at random. One exploded on the machine but caused no harm; its inertia carried the burning stars safely out of the traphouse. Those containing feathers produced a subtle, dreamy effect by comparison with their violent cousins, offering a foretaste of the bird seasons ahead. Perhaps the best, rivalled only by the flash charges, contained several whistling bottle rockets without the sticks.

Upon emerging from the traphouse we were greeted by a mixture of amusement and incredulity. Blunt and Syms were silent at first, but eventually even they managed a smile. Most of the shooters enjoyed the spectacle; in fact they were more curious than indignant. Of all the practical jokes the author has tried this was the best; in fact it exceeded our expectations.

When Mr. MacNaughton blasted the first bird, neither he nor any of the observers had the slightest idea what had happened! There is a special type of 12-bore ammunition, sold for wildlife control, which is nothing more than a small aerial salute. It did not occur to anyone that the explosive might have been in the target; instead it was decided that one of these "cracker shells" had found its way into MacNaughton's shooting bag and that, against all odds, he had managed to hit the target with the exotic projectile! Poor old MacNaughton doubted this theory but, shaken by the flash and lacking any other explanation, he found himself accepting it. The second surprise, with its miss and delayed report, only served to reinforce the shooters' erroneous assumption. It was not until the pigeons began whistling and dropping feathers that their creators were recognized. In fact if we had quit after the second bird we might have left people guessing for years, but we had no way of knowing this at the time. The author was later questioned by a constable, not about explosives law but about technical details. It seems the officer had tried gluing primacord and commercial "Bullz-I" targets inside clay pigeons, naturally without success.

Anyone wishing to duplicate this stunt must remember that Armstrong's mixture is extremely sensitive. There is a strong temptation to use powerful explosive fillings, but this could be disastrous if the target cracked on the throwing machine. Even with the milder payloads, gloves and safety glasses are advisable. Also, these targets must be loaded singly by hand; they are obviously not suitable for automated machines which have a "magazine" of clay birds. If the author ever tries the trick again, fillings will include black smoke stars, dragon eggs

and colored smoke puffs. At any rate, nobody who saw it will ever forget the day the pigeons shot back.

T. BABINGTON BRIMSTONE



## A CRATER IN ONE

*Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*

—VIRGIL, *ÆN.* I:ccijj.

I had waited patiently and suffered silently for almost two years to arrive at this week. I had made countless thermodynamic calculations, had pulled all-nighters studying the effects of electron spin, polymerization, and countless other sources of quantum tedium, to arrive at this week, which I had known had to come sooner or later. This week Dr. Inca Allen began a series of lectures, scheduled to last all week, on the detailed effects of nitration. Organic Chemistry 203, Framingham State University.

For five days I was in a State of Grace, arriving at class with spring in step and twinkle in eye previously unknown. All that week I sat enraptured, taking copious notes, as Dr. Allen laid out the intimate hows and whys of explosives.

As the week's lectures ended, I found a sense of elation and peace I'd never known. Suddenly Charles' Law, Boyle's Law, Avogadro's theorem, and myriad other tiresome mathematical exercises came together in one gleaming, brilliant moment of comprehension. I understood everything. I knew the meaning of the Universe, or at least how to blow it up; same thing.

After some thought as to a practical demonstration of my learning, I approached friend and colleague Chris Manning, a Chem. major at another college. Like myself, Chris had always held dear the belief that knowledge was sacred, and should always be used to wreck things and cause chaos and consternation wherever possible. It was almost a moral obligation with us, not unlike the oath lawyers take.

Chris was brilliant. He had once stolen an oxy-acetylene welder, poked a hole through the ice of a skating pond, and flooded the underside of the ice with the explosive gas mixture. The blast threw foot-thick ice cubes onto the nearby road and into the woods, dismembering some large trees in spectacular fashion. The returning skaters found their pond shaken, not stirred.

Chris, his friend Carbide (so nicknamed for his abrasive personality), and I sat at Chris's kitchen table, cracked a couple beers, and talked it over. I proposed we try an initial experiment with ammo-

nium nitrate, because of its easy availability, low cost, and unrecorded sales. There were drawbacks, though. You couldn't just fill a firecracker with the stuff and put a fuse in it. It had to be sensitized, boosted to high-order detonation, and initiated with a primary explosive. We had none of the stuff to do it, but college had at least taught us resourcefulness.

Ammonium nitrate is a common fertilizer (34-0-0 analysis), and we obtained one hundred pounds of it, no questions asked. Booster explosive was found in the form of Hercules Bullseye, a double-based smokeless pistol powder, which contains 39% nitroglycerin by weight. 6% #2 diesel oil by weight served to sensitize the ammonium nitrate and replicate ANFO, a commercial blasting explosive then made by DuPont. The electric blasting caps were provided by Chris' brother, a National Guardsman.

It took up only several days to assemble the necessary materials. Now came the more worrisome task of designing a definitive experiment that would hurt no one and keep us out of jail. My reputation with the local constabulary was such that I was sometimes interrogated for stout thunderclaps, and I could ill-afford trouble from this leap of destructive technology.

Chris proposed an underwater test, which would minimize noise and shock-wave damage. The Leo J. Martin golf course provided the water in the form of a brook that meandered through it, and although it was quite wide and hopefully deep, we had misgivings about tampering with what the local doctors, lawyers, judges, and other various elements of the local power structure called their playground.

Chris and I voted for a ten-pound device to start out, but Carbide would have none of that.

"Goddam pansies! Fifty fuckin' pounds! That'll goose 'em!," was Carbide's recommendation. Chris and I were horrified, explaining that we wished to "goose" nobody, and we drew the line at twenty pounds. After more verbal abuse from Carbide, we got him to agree to twenty pounds.

We were concerned enough about the police that we built a digital timer/detonator to assure that we'd be nowhere near the blast. What the BATF and FBI call hi-tech terrorist's detonators are pitifully easy to create. Anyone with fifteen bucks in his pocket and a local Radio Shack can do it in half an afternoon.

We took a digital travel alarm clock with a piezoelectric buzzer, disconnected the buzzer, and used its wires to bias an NPN power transistor in the common-emitter configuration, hooking the blasting cap between the transistor's collector and ground. It could be set for up to twenty-four hours. I suppose a VCR timer could be set thusly for up to a couple weeks, but I have yet to try it.



It was agreed that Chris and Carbide would set the timer, and that Carbide would drop the device in the brook from a small bridge, while I was bagging groceries at Stop and Shop and Chris was working at the laundromat. We would set it for a 24 hour delay, or 10:30 p.m. Nobody should be on the golf course then, and we'd return the next night to watch from a railroad trestle, about a mile from the first tee, where the brook and device would be.

It sounded like a good plan, but Chris and I were concerned about trusting any part of it to Carbide, whose nickname was not chosen inappropriately. Carbide was a chisel-jawed jock with a blond crew cut and weight-lifter's physique. He raved and bellowed when he spoke upon any subject. Although a college student, we didn't know, nor could we imagine, Carbide's major. Whatever his course of study, it apparently placed such a strain upon him that he had taken to amphetamines to keep pace with its rigors. He had found a cheap source of virulent speed then known as Black Beauties. While I never liked Carbide that much, nor was I in any position to lecture against drugs, Chris and I were both concerned for the fellow. Carbide's judgement suffered terribly, and when we all met at Chris's house to set the timer and put the finishing touches on our experiment, Carbide's appearance left us aghast. He strutted jerkily into Chris's kitchen, his bright blue eyes replaced by vast, black orbs. He sported cowboy boots, Bermuda shorts, and a tank-top reading "Basketball Jones."

Chris and I exchanged glances of horror. Finally Chris cleared his throat and said, "Say, ah, Carbide, love your threads, man. Great outfit! But don't you, uh, want to borrow my cammies and sneakers for, uh, planting bombs?"

Carbide snorted petulantly, called us pansies again, but went to change.

Chris and I were nervous. We were about to connect a nigger-rigged, half-assed detonator to something that would blow us all to atoms. Worse yet, we were about to entrust the damned thing to a speed-freak with the common sense of a teething two-year old. I had begun to catch faint whiffs of doom from this project's inception; now its pall hung heavy all around us.

We sat down and connected everything up, doing a final continuity check and circuitry check. Chris and I poured sweat, our mouths parched, both secretly wishing I'd never thought of doing this. Carbide was gleefully bobbing back and forth up on his bar stool, chortling and mumbling when he wasn't humming a Grateful Dead selection.

Our task finished, we left the bomb with Carbide, who fondled it lovingly while breaking into a whistle of some morbid Gerry Garcia lead. Now all Carbide had to do was set the timer and throw the whole thing in the drink.

We glanced back at Carbide once more as we left. The man didn't look well at all. And had those facial tics been there yesterday? Very worrisome indeed.

Chris and I went off to work but it was an evening filled with dread for us both. The first shoe dropped when Chris called me about midnight, after our work shifts, and asked if I'd been to his house to collect the remaining eighty pounds of ANFO. I said no, but that Carbide had probably just hidden it someplace; a prudent thing to do. But Chris and I both know how hollow that rang. Prudent things hadn't been Carbide's forte recently. We knew good and well what had happened. Carbide had gone and built a hundred pounder anyways. Yet the situation wasn't yet hopeless, for we could find and disarm the thing tomorrow night before it blew. And so we slept on it.

It seems that there are brief moments in the making of any great mistake when the whole thing could be avoided, given just a moment of wisdom and common sense. However, without such attributes (never my strongest suit), it appears as though minor mistakes compound into vast blunders, obtaining eventually an almost farcical level of darkness and doom, as Mick Jagger doubtless knew when he wrote "Paint it Black."

And so it was that the second shoe dropped when I was rocked out of bed on that Saturday morning by a shock wave that knocked my Red Sox pennants off the wall, crashed my model B-25 to the floor in pieces, and sent my cat scurrying for cover. My half-awake mind worked frantically to assure me that it was a sonic boom from a jet or a nearby thunderclap, but as my eyes opened upon a sunny day years after the Air National Guard had been forbidden from shaking the world thusly (a pity), I knew what had happened. I knew even before I looked at my watch - what time was it? It was 10:30 a.m. of course. After all, it couldn't have happened any other way.

I donned my jeans and tee-shirt with a strange sense of calm. Surely the first tee would have been crammed with golfers. Surely their broken bodies would litter the fairways and have been sent flying into distant trees, where they would now hang like grisly, gaudy Christmas ornaments.

On the three bicycled miles from my house to the golf course, I reflected upon what must have happened. Obviously, Carbide had mixed up his A.M. and P.M. on the digital timer. It was understandable, but making such a mistake with a hundred pound charge was a miserably morbid one. This was Endsville. . . . no doubt about it. I was gone.

My arrival at the golf course awed even me. Every cop and his brother from every department imaginable was present. So was the Fire

Department, rescue units, bomb squad, air-evac. helicopters, Elvis — EVERYBODY.

The calm, damp morning nurtured the blanket of white nitrate smoke that hugged the fairway. High in the air still hung the remnants of the dirty brown mushroom cloud, which had risen to a titanic height above the clubhouse.

It occurred to me that I shouldn't be seen here, but that illusion slid away like diarrhoea. It didn't matter where I was. I was in TROUBLE. The biggest TROUBLE of my life. While I've had various misadventures with fireworks and explosives on a smaller, marginally humorous scale, this was something else. The first tee looked like Hiroshima; a Hole in One Holocaust. Mud was everywhere. So were decades worth of golf balls that had strayed into the brook. The first fairway looked like a sewage treatment plant. The ooze dripped like vomit from those trees that still had leaves, which were few. The small bridge crossing the brook had been blown into something useful only to a maniacal motorcycle jumper, for it was horribly gnarled and twisted.

I resolutely waded into the crowd to try to establish a body count. Miraculously, nobody seemed to be carting off muddy human appendages to the ambulances. People stood around looking perplexed, muttering things like, "Dampned, just like Normandy Beach."

Golfers, who in that day usually dressed like chubby John Travoltas, smeared in vain at the mud caked on them.

No one spoke to me except Father O'Malley, who was still searching for his toupée amongst the madly look-alike divots that seemed to be everywhere. He knew of my interests, as priests are generally well-informed of things about town. He glanced up at me from his knees while eyeing a suspected toupée, only to find another divot. His glasses sat askew on his face, one lens plastered with mud. He gazed up at me with what seemed sardonic glee. "Making joyful noises unto the Lord again, eh Eddie?" O'Malley queried, but not without a trace of humor. I could only return his knowing smile, shrug, and amble off, after asking if he was O.K. He was. He laughed.

I shambled up behind a mobile T.V. truck, where a live broadcast was taking place. A pearly-toothed, perma-curved blond was describing the chaos abounding. Officer Maccini was standing among a coven of cops on my left, so I slithered under the T.V. truck to my right and listened, prepared for the worst.

It did not come. With the relief that can only be imagined as that of a last-second death-row reprieve or the accomplishment of the most urgent urination of one's life, I learned that apparently nobody had been hurt. Beneath WCUB-TV's truck, I wept with relief to think that we'd killed no one.

I was about to crawl out from under that truck again and make myself scarce, sensing possible survival of this situation, when a cold, huge, wet hand slapped me on the back of the neck. I sprang up with demonic tension, braining myself on that truck chassis so soundly that the world closed briefly into darkness, reappearing after several seconds.

I found myself staring into the bright green eyes of a huge bullfrog whose leap onto my neck I had mistaken for a hand's grasp. It regarded me accusingly, it seemed. I reached out to pet it, to reassure it. Yet something else was needed. I had blown the frog from its home and I had wrecked its world.

I scooped the frog up and scuttled from beneath the truck. The brook on the eighth green, about 150 yards away, looked about like the first tee's brook had been, so I cradled the frog and began walking in that direction.

I hurried through the excited mob towards the eighth green. I glanced towards the horde of Wellesley Police, not fifteen feet away, only to see Officer Paul Maccini was looking directly at me. Nobody else; just Paul. I stopped for a moment and we locked eyes. The frog swiveled its head and gazed at Maccini. I wonder to this day what Paul Maccini saw. Surely my eyes were red and tear-streaked, my face muddy and sorrowful. He must have seen the frog, for he seemed to smile faintly before I vanished back into the melée of panicked people.

I let the frog go back to a place very much like its home that I'd wrecked. I guess Maccini let me go too, for reasons unknown. Perhaps he had seen, in that brief moment of honesty that passed between us wordlessly, that I had learned a lesson. Oh, I had indeed.

It was a simple lesson for me, really. It's this: With liberty comes responsibility. They seem to go hand in hand.

Mild mischief in one thing, but life-threatening, random destruction is another. I hope never again to use my knowledge so as to harm those that are not a direct and dire threat to my life and liberty.

EDUARDO TELLERINI



## CALL BOOMO-ROOTER; OR, PLUMBING WITH GUNPOWDER

Ancient Chinese chronicles are confusing to scholars, and it is impossible to assign a certain date to it, but it is well understood that gunpowder has been made and used in the Orient since very

remote antiquity. By the middle of the thirteenth century, firecrackers and rockets were known in Western Europe, as confirmed by the writings of Roger Bacon and St. Albertus Magnus. A cannon is illustrated in the so-called Milimete manuscript (Christ Church No. 92) dated 1326, and guns are recorded to have been used at the battle of Crécy in 1343. Gunpowder was employed for military blasting by the sixteenth century, while German engineers originated its use in quarrying and extractive mining *circa* 1627.

It is evident from the history of gunpowder that the utmost exertions of human genius have been expended upon the discovery of new applications for this useful and valuable invention. Indeed, one might suppose that all its potential had been realized long ago, and the finding of the last new application occurred well before the memory of any man now living. One might suppose that – but one might suppose wrong. I was witness to such a new application as recently as a sultry summer afternoon in the early 1980's.

My erstwhile companion in pyrotechnic mischief, one Gregorio Buoncalze, possessed a spacious detached garage in the back yard of his suburban lot in a large Southern city. It was big enough for two cars and then some, though seldom were two cars parked in it, since an empty stall was the usual site of many of our pyrotechnic endeavors. In the center of the concrete slab that was its floor was a gently-inclined area leading to a floor drain. This drain, covered by a coarse circular iron grating, was the recipient of many gallons of wash water from cleaning the car, as well as (with a nod to the horror of environmentalists out there) the occasional tank of year-old lawnmower gas, or discarded crankcase-full of oil. The grate, though intended to intercept large clods of solid matter, was evidently not enough to prevent what came about – the drain had become stopped, and water was standing above the grate. Lye and a plumber's plunger were of no avail.

But Gregorio was not weary in well-doing, and this did not stop him. Having an acquaintance with the useful properties of gunpowder, he knew the solution to his problem. A waterproof gunpowder bomb was soon fashioned with several ounces of DuPont's FFFg, visco fuse, a Dixie cup (it was printed with little blue Smurfs – remember them?), the whole being thoroughly wrapped with duct tape.

Gregorio weighted the device with an old bolt or two so it would sink to the bottom of the drain. He removed the grate, lit the fuse, and dropped his depth charge into the gaping abyss. Then he replaced the grate, covered it with a piece of carpet remnant, and over this a large pine plank. To ballast all this further, he stood atop the plank.

Only a few moments of ominous silence elapsed before a deafening explosion rent the garage like

the bombardment of Port Arthur, hoisting Gregorio roofward and filling the place with smoke. The circular grating flew toward his pickup truck, crashing through its windshield, then out the driver's side window and into the hands of one of the crowd that had assembled to gawk at the spectacle. His ascent interrupted by the rafter that jumped out above his head, Gregorio fell from his acme and landed on one knee and one elbow on the concrete floor, splitting both joints to the bone. We never found how he explained his injuries at the hospital emergency room.

The standing water level eventually fell out of sight, though whether whatever was clogging the drain was actually dislodged was never established for certain. More likely, the explosion had cracked the pipe and allowed the water to seep out into the earth beneath the slab. Gregorio gave up pyrotechny about then, and the rest of us drifted apart. Thus, while I cannot claim that of those of us who saw this premiere application of gunpowder to the art of plumbing, I alone am left to tell the tale – probably, I'm the only one who will admit to it.

GIUSTIZIARE FIAMMANTE



## FLAMING CLAYS

### *The Game*

Shotgun target sports include trap, skeet, and (relatively new to the United States) sporting clays; because American and international rules differ slightly for both trap and skeet, there are five basic games, as well as numerous informal variations. All told there are probably almost as many ways to shoot at a target with a shotgun as there are ways to play billiards. Prudence might deter one from adding to them, but then, prudence was never one of our strong suits, and besides, all the mentioned sports have one salient limitation: they require daylight. Daylight for the shooter to see the target – daylight to see that he has broken or missed it.

Our new addition to this burgeoning field of sporting activity eliminates that problem by providing targets coated with pyrotechnic composition, which, being ignited, gives a brilliant indication of where the target is as it hurtles through the nighttime sky. These targets are then shot at using several kinds of pyrotechnic ammunition. Those who have been present at Imbibo Bourbonini's annual lake party can attest to the novelty and interest of this recent addition to the shooting sports.

## The Targets

Standard clay pigeons, available at any decent hardware or sporting goods store, require only a bit of simple modification to be converted into "flaming clays." Different brands of standard clay target have slightly different profiles, but all have a common diameter and height, and all have a flat spot on the top of the dome. This flat spot is surrounded by a small ridge. It is this central area that is coated with composition.

Snowdon's titanium sparkler composition (*Pyrotechnica* • IV, p. 23) is well suited for the purpose. It is as follows:

|                                |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| Potassium perchlorate          | 1 lb.    |
| Titanium, 100-300 mesh         | 1 lb.    |
| Dextrine                       | 6-7 oz.  |
| Water, warmed to 90°-120° Fah. | 8-12 oz. |

This is dampened with water to a suitable consistency for making sparklers, but instead of using it for that purpose, the slurry should be poured into the central area on each pigeon. If desired, stars may be stuck in the slurry like cloves in a ham. The pigeons are then allowed to dry.

A spot of priming paste (meal powder/nitrocellulose lacquer) about the size of a quarter should be applied to the dried surface of the sparkler composition, and in this should be embedded a piece of black match or visco fuse. Once the prime is dry, the targets are ready for throwing.

To throw the targets, an *all-metal* spring trap, of the type used for informal practice, is best. If there are any plastic parts on the throwing arm, they will quickly be cremated. Using a spring trap a single operator may easily set the target on the throwing arm, light the fuse, and when the composition has caught, pull the release.

The objection to plastic parts on a spring trap is, oddly enough, reversed in the event a hand trap is used. Excellent and cheap plastic hand traps are available for \$5.00 and they have the virtue of being ambidextrous. The metal, spring-loaded, hand traps are suited only for the right-handed thrower, are more expensive, and often shatter the target. The cheap plastic traps can simply be thrown away when they get too burnt-up. Using a hand trap requires a bit more coordination, and a third party (in addition to the one with the shotgun and the one with the trap) whose function it is to light the fuse while the man with the hand trap is in the "wound-up" position, ready to throw.

Needless to say, this activity best takes place with the targets may be thrown over water. Missed targets often fall while still alight, and the neighboring farmer will probably not be pleased if you burn down his wheat field.

## The Ammunition

Over the years, many types of pyrotechnic ammunition have been devised and manufactured, and then abandoned. The Germans, with their genius for toy fireworks, were especially prolific inventors. At present there are only four types available, to this author's knowledge. All are 12-bore 2¾" standard. Though such cartridges have been made in other sizes in the past, it is probably the makers' judgment that the above is the most common variety of shotgun, and they make their ammunition to fit. 10-bore, 8-bore, and especially 4-bore would offer more room for pyrotechnic effects. The writer recently purchased a 4-bore side-by-side flare pistol from Companion Guistiziere Fiammante. No ammo came with it; alas and God-damn.

1) *The "shell-cracker."* These shells contain a single, "M-80" size firecracker as their only projectile. Nominally used for wildlife control (bird-scaring) by farmers, in fact their best market is probably among people who can buy them legally for use as fireworks, whereas the report component inside the shell would be illegal if vend- ed as a firecracker! A strange society we live in these days.

Whilst ammunition of this type has been made by European, American, and Japanese firms in the past, that currently available is of Chinese origin. The cartridge is all-plastic, having no brass at the base or rim. Despite this *avant-garde* appearance the contents are quite low-tech - black powder propellant and a report insert fused with Chinese fuse around which is consolidated a clay plug (just like a "Flashing Thunder" candle insert).

2) *The signal flare/tracer.* The cartridges of this type familiar to the present writer are of European origin; some have been marked Zink Feuerwerk, others Cheddite. Wherever made, they have, by contrast to the Chinese shell crackers, a very old-fashioned external appearance and comparatively modern innards. Outwardly, the shell is a low-brass, paper, roll-crimped load reminiscent of those in use fifty years ago; the initial "R", "G", or "W" is stamped on the "overshot wad," denoting red, green, or white. Inside, one finds a one-piece spun aluminum cup, approximately 2" long and 1¼" in outside diameter. Into this cup is charged perhaps ¾" of a nitrate/magnesium/PVC type color composition over which is a thin layer of prime. The apparent "overshot wad" is actually the closed end of the aluminum cup. The propellant powder is a coarse, macaroni-shaped smokeless powder that is evidently capable of quick burning despite a sloppy fit of the projectile in the bore, and accordingly poor obturation.

The appearance made by the tracer is not like that of a military tracer in a rifle calibre. Rather, it resembles a large Roman candle star, well-propelled to perhaps 70-80 yards. Because of the low pressure generated, a fair amount of the coarse smokeless powder is left unburnt, and this, falling out of the bores onto the standing breech, action flats, and underlumps of the gun may, in time, make it impossible to close a tightly-fitting action. Simply taking the weapon down and brushing out the powder makes everything right again, but it can be disconcerting as the writer once found at one of Imbibo's lake parties!

On one occasion the writer actually *hit* the target with one of these tracers; a rare experience, rather like a hole-in-one. Commonly with these, as with the shell-crackers, the best one can do is see how close to the target it is possible to shoot.

- 3) "*Dragon's-breath*"/"*Flame-thrower*" loads. Often sold at elaborate prices to the *Soldier of Fortune* types during gun shows – along with flechette loads, chain-shot (two .69-cal. balls joined by a piece of piano wire), etc. – these shells deserve consideration for flaming clays, although the writer must confess never to have tried them. Dissection reveals the "shot load" to be little cylindrical pieces of misch-metal (a semi-pyrophoric cerium alloy used for cigarette-lighter flints). Indeed, the shot is just about the same as cigarette-lighter flints except for the red lacquer coat found on the flints. Unlike the two previous types of ammunition, "dragon's-breath" loads are loaded at full service pressures and the "shot" is capable of breaking a target. Some of it ignites immediately as it leaves the bore, whether from friction with the bore walls or because of its velocity through the air; some of it ignites upon striking a suitably hard target. I am told that a blast directed against a concrete block wall from a suitable distance is a spectacular display.
- 4) *Shot/tracer ammunition*. This, in the writer's opinion is the best choice among pyrotechnic ammunitions. Once made by major U.S. manufactures such as Winchester and Remington, it was discontinued by them years ago for fear of the fire hazard. Now it is available again under the name of "Tru-tracer" from Bottom Line Shooting Supplies (P.O. Box 258, Clarkesville, Georgia 30523, catalog number 43392); Cabela's (812-13th Ave., Sidney, Nebraska 69160, catalog number HD-21044); Gander Mountain (Box 248, Highway W, Wilmot, Wisconsin 53192, catalog number 160-L-10004) – and possibly even your local outfitters. The idea is to provide a

modest (1-oz.) trap load combined with a visible pyrotechnic trace. These are used to teach shotgun shooting during the daytime. It is well-known that an instructor can stand beside the shooter and see the path of the wads – or, with a little practice, *the shot itself* – and tell the shooter, in the event of a miss, that he was high, low, before, or behind the target. On the other hand, it is difficult for the shooter himself, preoccupied with the target itself and the handling of the gun, to see any of this. Thus the shot-tracer was devised. A small tube charged with tracer composition is incorporated in the wad column, taking fire from the explosion of the powder. Bright enough to be seen in daytime, the tracers are a fine display at night, coupled with the potential for actually shattering the flaming clay!

#### *The Guns*

Needless to say, the writer's strong preference would be for a graceful side-by-side of impeccable balance and fit; practically speaking, almost any fixed-breech gun will work with all four types of ammunition. There is virtually no recoil from the shell-crackers and signal flares because of the light projectiles and small amounts of propellant. Self-loading shotguns, whether on the recoil or gas-operated principle, would thus be unsuited for these types, unless the action were cycled by hand. The Chinese shell-crackers with their all-plastic rims are rather fragile and are best used with a broad, gentle extractor such as is found in break-action single and double guns; the hook-type extractor/ejector of a pump gun might tear right through such a rim. Indeed, the writer has found that sometimes the rim will slip over the extractor of a double gun upon opening, and the empty case must be knocked out via a cleaning rod down the muzzle.

With "dragon's-breath" and shot/tracer rounds, chamber pressures are at normal service levels and operation of an auto-loader should be without problems. Nonetheless, with both these and the other types, residue is left behind from the pyrotechnic combustion as well as from the powder; claims as to its non-corrosive characteristics should be viewed with scepticism. Immediate cleaning of the gun is *necessary* after using all types of pyrotechnic ammo! The writer would be particularly shy of using a gas-operated auto-loader with any of them because of the extensive cleaning required. Maybe the best advice as to choice of guns is to pick one you don't care too much about or else be prepared to clean your gun *thoroughly* and *quickly* after shooting.

#### *Final thoughts*

Upon broaching the idea of this new sport to fellow I.O.O.J. companions, the writer was

astonished at the remarkable resonance the idea had with them. Many of us are just as enthusiastic about shooting as about pyrotechny, it seems – anything that goes bang! – and why not combine the two? One, a courteous gentleman of Norwegian ancestry who makes his home on the Northern plains, told of setting off enormous quantities of Silver Jets and Buzz Bombs from sheets of plywood, while his friends lined up with shotguns and tried to knock them out of the sky. The development of the idea that outstripped this writer's wildest imaginings, however, may be found in T. Babington Brimstone's article "The Day the Pigeons Shot Back" (*q.v.*, elsewhere in this issue). We at *The Case Former* would be most interested in other developments along these lines, and encourage our readers to send 'em in. *Waidmannsheil!*

ERNST PFANTODT

## MOVIE SPECIAL EFFECTS

*"These three guys were chasing me up a hill with murder on their minds, and all I had to defend myself with was dynamite."*

—JIMMY STEWART in *Fool's Parade*

*"You think we used enough dynamite there, Butch?"*

—ROBERT REDFORD in  
*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

When most people think of movie special effects, they think of *Star Wars* and Harrison Shylift with the Crossettes of Doom. Me, I remember other things – the Henrys (Greasy and Mean), and the Unearthly Scream.

Mean Henry and Greasy Henry were father and son. They owned the High Times Drive-In, and with all the activities going on there, it was aptly named. Mean Henry, the father, was a million years old; factual proof that the undead exist. I never heard him begin a sentence without swearing. He was so cold that if you poured boiling water down his throat, he'd pass ice cubes. Mean Henry was the projectionist. In his concrete blockhouse, there were rifle slits for Mean's B.A.R. At various times during the show, Mean would thrust out the barrel and survey the crowd – definitely an attention-getter.

Greasy Henry was a large, heavy-set guy about five feet ten. His father signed him up for the Marines when he was sixteen. He did one tour in Korea, one in Okinawa as an M.P., and two tours in Vietnam. Greasy and Mean lived for two things

– swilling beer and hoping that someone would rob the High Times. Greasy had paid off the right people, so he carried his service .45 at all times. He kept a 12-ga. autoloader in the ticket booth. One afternoon, the dumbest group of ghetto apes ever bred tried to rob the drive-in. No one was there – the money was in the bank. Greasy and Mean were soaking up beers in the shade of the concession stand. Suddenly, these yard apes crashed their car through the chain-link hurricane fence. The car broke down, and one of the mooks descended from it, saw Greasy, and let fly with his .38. Greasy returned fire. Scratch one mook. This woke Mean from his alcoholic stupor. He chugged around the corner and opened up with his B.A.R. The mooks never knew what hit them. It is a tribute to Marine training that, as drunk as Mean was, he was able to hit a disabled car at ten feet. Sometime during the exchange, the mooks managed to snap off a couple of shots.

Grease meanwhile got his grease-gun from the snack bar and counterpointed Mean's fire. Reports say after they emptied a sack of clips into this car (four dead porch apes), Mean then staggered forward and urinated on the car. The coroner packed off the pieces, and Mean had the wreck towed to a corner space. It sat there for years, peacefully rusting into oblivion. Grease and Mean would get looped and pose for pictures like the Great White Hunters, feet on the bumper, and guns in hand.

Grease took a liking to me and my beer. I spent many a Friday night there, watching bad T. & A. movies, drinking beer, and shooting fireworks. Grease loved fireworks, especially bottle rockets. He fired them singly out of his empty beer bottle, again and again; he fired them out of buckets and pails, and every now and then when alcoholic poisoning set in, he would take a mailing tube, fill it with powder, drop in a whole shit-load of bottle rockets on top of it, then lay a train of powder to the lip of the tub. After he hoisted this contraption to his shoulder, he'd chuck his cigar butt into the end. The resulting flash fired out bottle rockets *en masse*, illuminating whatever target at which he chose to aim. Greasy's only problem was that this led inevitably to burns from the dross. He'd hop around, cursing and swearing at everyone and everything. To approach him during one of these rages was tantamount to suicide. Grease would rant and rave. Then he'd pound back half-a-dozen beers and look all over for someone to hit. Finally, he would find the tube and reload, waiting for another such chance for fire it.

A few years later, Grease and a couple of his buddies were chugging boilermakers. This led to the brilliant idea of firing off a massive bottle-rocket volley. Grease picked up his tube, grabbed a can of black powder and emptied the whole thing

into the tube, then crammed bottle rockets into it, and added more powder. Then another layer of rockets on top of this! Grease grinned like the Cheshire cat. This would be the world's greatest rocket launch. He stepped out into the lot and took aim at Kitten Natividad's naked chest filling the screen. He screamed, "die, you slope-headed bastards!" and touched it off; the resultant shot, if not heard round the world, resounded around the drive-in. Grease was never found – at least not his head.

Mean was never quite the same. A few months later, the High Times was sold. Mean emigrated to Israel to shoot at the "Ay-rabs" with his B.A.R. No crosses anywhere over there, so he would probably live forever. Every time I read about a new hot spot, I look closely at the papers for a picture of a cadaverous vampire with a B.A.R. "Good even-ing. Ah! The guns of the night. Such music they play."

Every Friday night thereafter for about three years, Tim, the world's crudest human being, would call me. The conversation included where we could score some beer and other potables, or any other mind-expanders. Then he'd mention the Hillside Drive-In and its porno movies. I'd ask if he'd gotten any women to come along, or were we just going to drink and drink. Tim could find the sleaziest babes you ever met. We'd pile into his station wagon and cruise to Wisconsin. Quick stop for pizza and beer, and then the naked people. These were *really bad* films, folks, and when they got exceptionally bad, Tim, I, and the other animals would spray each other with beer, shoot fireworks, and chuck M-80s. Tim bought grocery bags full of them from the Wisconsin bootleggers. This was an adventure in itself. Then, we'd park in the back row and party down.

Tim had staggered off to the flooded john. When he came back, he was aglow with excitement. "Come with me," he encouraged. We went down a row of cars, and there sat a brown Chevy Calais with dealer plates. Immediately, I recognized it as our neighbor Mr. Alt. "Who's he with?" I asked. By the dim light of the screen, I could make out the bottle-blond coiffure of his well-endowed sexy wife. They were sitting close together, smooching and carrying on like a couple of teenagers. For some reason, this thoroughly pissed off old Tim. As we slunk back to our car, Tim kept muttering about "those old farts," and how they should be at home, and not messing around, ruining his appreciation of what (had we then known about JFK and Marilyn) might well have been called the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

When we arrived at the car, Tim's anger had boiled over. He grabbed the sack of M-80s, and started passing them out. "I'm going to attack those

bastards. I'm going to blow the piss out of them. Remember Pearl Harbor! Marines, over the top!" – on and on he ranted and foamed at the mouth, as he got less and less lucid. We were afraid not to go with him. We crept up upon the car, crackers in hand, ready to surprise the Alts. We maneuvered into position – and to our surprise, we watched as Mrs. Alt kissed her husband, then dropped her head into his lap. Our fevered imaginations were rampant. We knew what *they* were doing.

"Now!" hissed Tim, after we had stood transfixed for a few minutes of prurient speculation. Zippo's split the night – fuses caught – arms threw – and KABLAM! Wiley Coyote couldn't have done it better. A brilliant white flash! Then, a sound that I'll remember forever – the most hideous unearthly scream, bellowing banshee-like over the sounds of the drive-in. On and on it went. Tim and I did the perfect Three Stooges double-take. Oh, did we split! Remember John Belushi & Company outside of the Dean's office in *Animal House*? That's how we moved! Back to the car, fired it up, and we ran like hell.

Weeks later a very shaken Mr. Alt was released from Miller Hospital after extensive reconstructive surgery. Now, we don't know exactly what happened, but our juvenile imaginations worked overtime on this one. Let me just say that Tooth Fairy jokes abounded.

The movies are great medicine. I know this article isn't a rant against political correctness, or the P.G.double I.Q. less, but the *Case Former* just doesn't come out often enough for such to be published in timely fashion. So, maybe the P.C. crowd has won after all. I just don't know anymore. We work all the time and still can't find a *Lust-Bombe*. I guess I'll just go see a movie. 🍿

PAOLO DA GIRO



## BBQ CHICKEN – I.O.O.J. STYLE

### Ingredients:

- Used grease barrel – cut in half
- Large bonfire (old tires make best fuel)
- Large caliber pistol (.45 is preferred, but 9mm will also do)
- 2 bags of charcoal
- a gallon of gasoline (lighter fluid can be substituted, but gas is preferred)
- 10,000 candlepower road flare
- two steel grill racks (square ones work best)
- Asst. pieces cut chicken
- BBQ sauce (home brewed is preferred, but store bought will suffice)

Start by cutting the grease barrel in half. As most places do not clean their grease barrels before throwing them away, there will be grease left in it. This can be easily remedied by putting the barrels on top of the bonfire to burn the grease off. After the grease has burnt clean off, remove the barrels and allow them to cool (open end up). As every fireworks man knows, there are two things a fire needs to burn: fuel and air. Since grease barrels are intended to keep grease in, there are no holes that permit air to feed the fire. This creates a large problem that can easily be fixed with your .45 (or 9mm). The holes should be evenly spaced around the bottom of the barrel to allow even air flow. A good sized barrel will need ten to fourteen holes. Next, dump charcoal into the barrel until you have a good sized pile. Douse with plenty of gasoline, stand back, and throw lit road flare in to get the coals going. Now it is time to wait awhile and let the coals burn until all of the coals have turned white and there is a good source of heat coming off the grill. When the coals are done, put steel grate onto the top of the barrel and get the chicken. Cook the chicken to your preference, adding BBQ sauce during the last five minutes of cooking. Sit back, grab a beer and some potato salad and enjoy. 🍴

ANTONIO GIANSLAVI



## THE MALEVOLENT ARTIFICER

*Sweetheart, baby, would I lie to you?*

—MILANO GIANSLAVI

Hello again, everybody. In this issue of *The Case Former*, Milano is going to pick on a few people. This may seem mean-spirited, but truthful words aren't always beautiful.

A new class of pyrojerks has come to my attention. You may have run across them before; however, because you are not divinely inspired like Milano, you could not properly name them. The name I have chosen for them is "FUNDAMENTalists" (*sic*). The work must be written with "FUNDAMENT" in capital letters, and "alists" in lower-case. A short trip to *Webster's* may be helpful to some.

The basic FUNDAMENTalist is the fuselighter, typically a dipshit who rises to the top solely because of an ability to float.\* Well, Mister Fuselighter, here is your shell.

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\*ED. NOTE: *As the continuing existence of Congress demonstrates; "turds of a feather, float together."*

### *Single Break Fuselighter Shell*

Take a six-inch plastic ball shell case; fill with two-inch pieces of visco that have their ends primed. Use FFA for a burst charge, and lift and leader as usual. Any competent pyrotechnist can make these for you.

### *Single Break Chitterling ("Chit'lun") Shell*

Take a box of frozen chitterlings, break out the center six or so in order to admit a flashbag. Use a dry wrap; lift and leader. Keep this shell on dry ice until ready to fire.

Now, you may ask yourself, "Just what in Hell is Milano driving at?" Well, I'm going to tell you. Wait and see what kind of fallout is going to be generated from these two little shells – every fuse-lighting FUNDAMENTalist is going to feel picked-on. Many of them will get faxes, calls, or letters from concerned friends saying "Look what was written about you, you should be mad!" Sadly, what needs to be said is "How in Hell, and by whomever in Hell, did this type of jerk get let into our midst anyway?"

I suppose we will again hear about how we are "racist," for the chitterling shell. I don't mean to be racist. I only want to show what should happen to our FUNDAMENTalist friends. Being caught in a shower of a\*\*holes is what the rest of us put up with, so I suppose it won't hurt them.

To summarize: We have too many FUNDAMENTalists in pyrotechny, and in the P.G.I.I., and too many people pay attention to them. Not enough is being done to get rid of this human debris. 🍴

Faternally,  
MILANO



## A DEATH IN FARGO (?)

*Was helffn Fackeln, Lichter oder Brilln,  
Wann die Leute nicht sehen wollen?*

—HEINRICH KHUNRATH

*If God had not intended them to be sheared,  
he would not have made them sheep.*

—CHARLATAN WHEEZE

Fellow pyrotechnists, I call out to you. Don your sack-cloth, grab your ashes. Burn the incense and chant the dirge in lament. Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead! (That's from Monty Python, folks, a comedy troupe; not the Mountebank, who is funny only unintentionally).

The Fargo convention of the P.G.I.I. may well have sounded the death knell of true amateur



pyrotechny in the U.S. It seems there are those who no longer want to see the unique, the best, the hand-made, the original. As the convention becomes more commercialized, what some want is five nights of Public Display/Product Demonstrations. This pernicious trend has, like the camel with its nose under the tent, great potential for future distress. What I refer to is the injection of monetary awards into the competitions. I'm not talking about the Bill and Sue Hoyt award, which is modest enough and comes from members' voluntary contributions. I'm talking about the notion of commercial sponsorship for competition. Some suggested (or rumored) amounts of prize money are such as to suborn the Guild, or individual competitors, making the Guild beholden to one big contributor instead of to its members, while altering the attitude in competition from one of striving for excellence for its own sake towards one of a "run for the money." Once the big bucks are on the table, where will the sharing of information and camaraderie among firework-makers, which has been so characteristic in the past, go? Expect to see it go straight down the drain, replaced by a close-mouthed rivalry that might become bitter and unscrupulous. We have heard laughing allusions in the past to the possibility of competitors pasting a layer of paper over a Japanese import and passing it off as their own. This could become a reality – if it hasn't already.

Safety-fakery continues to rear its ugly head. It even prevented a donation to Friday's public display from being accepted, though the proffered item was first-quality material from a true fireworks man. We of the I.O.O.J. were more than pleased to fire it at the late-night special manifestation for the induction of its creator, in the wee hours after the Friday P.G.I.I. event. Note to the Cody Flash: we're happy to shoot and appreciate your work, even if the Guild's Barney Fife clones don't want it.

Every year the convention gains a nickname. That of '93 will live in infamy as the Year of the Mosquito. Now, I've experienced mosquitoes before, but I've never been attacked in formation like I was in Fargo. I pulled out my shotgun and set up some ack-ack fire to knock some of them down, but three boxes of shells later, I gave in. The vampiric little bastards can suck my blood – they're no worse than the brain-numbing P.G.I.I. offissary.

It might sound from these comments as if I did not have a good time in Fargo. Well, I did. We had some good fireworks; second, I met some new fireworks men; third, I saw some old friends (always a good thing), the public display was good, and then there was the Party (see our "Proceedings," elsewhere in this issue).

Fireworks-wise, I saw four truly memorable shells; two in competition, and two in the public display. The public display had fantastic crossettes. An eight-

inch tremalon, and a five-break six-inch charcoal crossette – we all know who made them, and they performed flawlessly. Need I say more.

I saw something great in a ball shell. The maker called it a peanut shell, I knew it of old as a piled shell. Two twelve-inch spheres designed to break at the same time – all I can say is WOW! Then there was a "Hum and Planets." Now, I knew who built it, but somehow it was announced as someone else's. How can this happen? I don't know.

Old friends returned and we had a chance to speak of many things. Too bad and too sad that it soon ended. Happy to meet, sorry to part, and (devoutly I hope) happy to meet again! To a true Southern Gentleman: Glad you could make it! We were all pleased that you could be there. We have missed you in years gone by. Come back some time, and we'll buy you dinner. Remember, the Lake awaits.

So, old friends, let's talk about the Offissary. First, I recommend that the Offissary buy the following: *Miss Manners' Guide to Etiquette*, Betty Crocker's *Boys' and Girls' How to Give a Party*, and a tape of the musical, "Little Shop of Horrors."

Why, you ask?

As to the first-mentioned: to learn how to write a proper thank-you note.

As to all three: I'll answer this with a riddle. Someone asked our host at the I.O.O.J. Blast – what is the major difference between an I.O.O.J. party and the P.G.I.I. convention? His response – *we don't run out of food at an I.O.O.J. affair*. There, you don't go away hungry.

The Afterglow Parties at the P.G.I.I. convention suck. There are the final insult and indignity on the part of an uncaring, unconcerned, pikerish, overbearing P.G.I.I. offissary. Why do we spend good money on plastic binders and ugly tee-shirts? Instead, imagine us as the big Green Monster from Outer Space in "Little Shop of Horrors." "Feed me" we chant – "feed me." One plate of congealed cold cuts on a bed of wilted lettuce is not proper food. Spend money on what matters, not on junk! Remember, what matters, what counts, is making convention-goers happy. Wake up and smell the missing coffee. "Feed me – feed me." Enough – I could go for hours on the two-faced, double-speaking, mealy-mouthed offissary.

Rather than wallow in their mire, I would speak about the finest thing to happen at any convention – meeting genuine fireworks men. I met three of them this year. Sadly, fireworks people *properly understood* are dying out. There are probably only about a hundred or so left in the United States. Now, I'm not talking about people who simply love fireworks. These are more numerous, are friends, and help us out. I certainly don't mean "pyros" – this term has acquired a connotation like "Trekkies" or "Techno-Weenies." I mean the sort of person

who has a craftsman's technical command of pyrotechny, and perhaps an artist's vision.

Let me introduce you to three new fireworks people in my acquaintance. First is the Cody Flash. I was standing discussing the nature of God and His retribution against scoundrels. I was just about to talk about the scourging of plagiarists and charlatans, when this pleasant fellow asked about a method of building mines I had demonstrated. We talked about it, and he questioned me on another point. I told him if he walked with me, we could discuss this, but a fellow gun collector was going to show me some guns he had brought. When one of the shotguns was pulled from the trunk, the Flash recognized and discoursed on its features and the inventions of James Purdey. I was impressed; anyone who likes old shotguns can't be half bad. My conversations impressed me with his knowledge and common sense. Friday night, after the P.G.I.I. display was long done, during the Induction, I saw his work. This impressed me even more! A proper – let us say, *magisterial* – tourbillion. Why don't other people make these? Because they can't! Thanks, Cody!

With some embarrassment I confess I can't remember the second person's name\*. Since he makes ball shells (which some pyro-traditionalists think un-mentionable), let's call him the Man with No Name (hey, I like westerns). I've seen his work, and it's very impressive. I guess maybe ball shells *do* exist. Sorry – God, but it was beautiful work. So, No Name, wear your distinction with pride. You do good work. See you at the Lake.

The last "fireworks man" I met was in fact a beautiful woman. She spoke of the great shells she had seen, then she told me she was learning to build fireworks as she was involved with No Name. I told you to build the best shells she could – I wanted to know what she would specialize in. She didn't know. She told me that she loved crossettes, and as a matter of fact, dreams of a friend's multiple-break crossette when she wants to feel good.

Pretty Lady, what you should do is follow your dreams – built crossettes. A wise man once told me always to follow your dreams. I've chased mine for years. So, go the the shop and start on your crossettes – hope to see your shells soon.

Last but not least I'd like to thank our convention host, our brother Cam. Cam, you run a hell of a show. Hope you can host again some time (but maybe you're not such a glutton for punishment). Your unselfish conduct set a proper example in the contrast to those who would exploit (or have exploited in the past) these events for clandestine gain. Let's hope there's still life in the old-fashioned P.G.I. ideals, and the organization can

be steered back towards benefit to its members and the state of pyrotechnic knowledge, and away from commercialization and self-aggrandizement.

PAOLO DA GIRO

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ALLOCUTION OF THE RT. VEN.  
BIANCO GASOLINI, P.:G.:C.:,  
AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GRAND  
MANIFESTATION OF THE SOCIETY

*Es siegte die Stärke,  
und krönet zum Lohn  
die Schönheit und Weisheit  
Mit ewiger Kron'!*

—E. SCHICKANEDER

Another year has passed, another convention has come and gone, and the I.O.O.J. is still alive and kicking. Messrs. Witless, Wheeze, and Mendacio can look forward to a bigger, better *Case Former* with this issue and many more to follow. Despite their wishful thinking, they are far far from hearing the last of us.

Fargo was, all in all, not a bad convention with only a couple of truly revoltin' developments. The first of these was the election to the First Vice Presidency of a man who mistakenly thinks that the summer flooding in his home state extended to the entire midwest, and selected his convention apparel accordingly.\* I *do* own a pair of penny loafers and I *was* fond of wearing them until I bore witness to such a spectacle. At least for now, said shoes reside at the back of my closet and will remain there.

We also experienced the pain of politicization of the races for PGI office. Tee-shirts? Posters? We only wish that the qualities thereon attributed to

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\*ED. NOTE.: *Companion Giustiziere Fiammante and several others conducted a pool on which day of the Convention the Mountebank would show up with the most badges and patches. Although Companion Girolamo the younger won, this aspect of the Mountebank's get-up was more subdued this year than in the past. On the other hand, his fetching ensemble of mid-calf length trousers, white socks, and penny-loafers drew much appalled scrutiny. Some contend, as Rt. Ven. Comp. Gasolini does, that the high-water pants were in recognition of Iowa's flooding. Other Iowans in attendance were, however, normally dressed, and this gives strong credibility to the theory of Comp. da Giro that in fact the Mountebank's attire was patterned after the torador pants fashionable among women in the 'sixties. We leave the final decision in this vexed question, as ever, to the peerless judgment of our learned readers.*

\*ED. NOTE: Paolo may not, but we know it, and will see CF #2 his issue – Case Former mailroom staff.



*Off to an early start – Our Order's most junior member.*

Mountebank Witless really were present in his character. Oh well, the past year's elections, including those last November, have been a large disappointment.

1993 also brought something called the Public Display Inspection Team. Composed of two peck-erheads who for all appearances don't know diddly-squat about fireworks, this team purportedly was set up to "make PGI Public Displays safer." How riding around in a golf cart yelling at people who have been in the display business for years while ignoring obvious real safety concerns will lead to this, I haven't the foggiest. As far as I'm concerned, those who are not capable of safely conducting a public display should not be asked to participate. This is all part of the egalitarian scheme to encourage "participation" by idiots and assholes, as well as craftsmen and *real* fireworks men.

The events in Fargo were followed by a wonderful party on Saturday night, complete with tire fire (to prepare the grease barrels for conversion into barbecues), an air show (provided by a crop duster, thoughtfully engaged by our host to blanket the site in mosquito-killer and assure us an insect-free evening), and high explosives. The presence of ample and excellent food, the absence of blood-sucking bugs, and the happy abandon with which those present shot numerous fireworks (all without untoward incident) thus distinguished our Grand Manifestation from the preceding PGI Convention.

Many new companions were inducted, and I had the honor of passing the reins of the I.O.O.J. to the Right Venerable Eduardo Tellerini, who was installed in due and ancient form. I wish him the best, and can assure one and all that our Order could not be in more capable hands. Keep those *Case Former* articles coming, folks, as all are a joy to read. May Vulcan smile down upon us all! ☿

## W. R. WITHROW, 1940 - 1993

*Hor che luci sì belle  
con fulgori soave  
trattan del Ciel le chiave  
e trionfan le Stelle  
non san coi lampi lor pagnar gli abissi  
che soggetti non son gli Astri agl'eclissi.*

—ALESSANDRO STRADELLA

Though our Order, and this publication, exist primarily to share good friendship, good fireworks, and good humor – preferably for a long time to come – there must be times of somber reflection, and this is such a time. One of our great fireworks men is no longer among us.

W.R. (Bill) Withrow died on October 16, 1993. He collapsed on the way to the hospital with an acute pneumonia, never regaining consciousness. He suffered heart failure; his heart was started, and again failed.

Born on July 24, 1940, Bill was an enthusiastic pyrotechnist from youth. He was also an electronics expert and ham radio operator; via the airwaves he met another ham, Max P. Vander Horck, and found that apart from an interest in radio, he shared with Van the same birthday and also a passion for fireworks. Bill became an associate editor of *Pyronews* (1966-67) and later *American Pyrotechnist* (1968-70). By virtue of his association with Van's publication he was *de facto* a co-founder of the Pyrotechnics Guild International, and later its vice-president (1975-76). He served as an editor of *Pyrotechnica* for ten years (1983-93).

Bill was a consultant and lead pyrotechnist for Atlas Enterprises. Fireworks photographer extraordinaire, display operator, shell-maker, choreographer, long-time friend of Ron Lancaster, Jimmy Grucci, "Firecracker Bill" Engelke, Max Vander Horck, and many others, he was a walking encyclopædia of fireworks lore.

Although his health was delicate in latter years, Bill bore his suffering with stoicism; even as when he was prescribed oxygen for his emphysema, with self-mocking humor, he allowed himself to be photographed with the oxygen bottle and a ridiculous sign. Perhaps because of this, few of his friends knew the seriousness of his condition.

Two funeral services were held, one on October 19 at Fayetteville, Arkansas, and another on October 21 at Logansport, Indiana, Bill's home town. In characteristic fashion, Bill always said he wanted a Dixieland jazz band and a fireworks display at his funeral, but this was not possible. His wife, Karen Lamsens Withrow, suggested as an alternative that Bill's friends remember him by shooting a shell and in lieu of flowers, which Bill always thought a "waste" at funerals, a donation to a heart or lung charity was requested.

*Lux æterna luceat ei, Domine.*

*Important Announcements from*

# CHARLATAN WHEEZE ENTERPRISES, INC.

## *Publications Department*

We regret to announce that the *Journal of Pyrotechnic Farts and Sausages* will not be published until the Greek Kalends, or Hell freezes over, whichever comes later. This project has been taken over by the Canadian Authority for Testing Selected Highly Improbable Technologies, under the able direction of Prof. Traditore Detestabile, Ph.D., of Montréal. The new publication will be entitled *Revue d'escroquerie et friponnerie pyrobolique* and will carry articles from international contributors. Lead article in the upcoming issue: "Arschleckerei und Feuerwerkerei: Wegweisern nach einem Karriere" by the noted expert witness Dr. Blasius Rauchmantl.

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Dr. Rauchmantl's undergraduate work was done at St. Hoprig's College in the University of Poictesme, with a year of exchange study under the noted Prof. Asmodeo Belial at the University of Salamanca, a revered member of the Faculty there. Rauchmantl's post-graduate studies in the Department of Inconsequential Studies at the Academy of Lagado led to First-Class Honours. His dissertation topic was "Selected Problems in the Extraction of Sunbeams from Cucumbers." He also researched the breeding of naked sheep, and the softening of marble for the manufacture of pincushions.

Following his attainment of the Doctoral degree, Rauchmantl worked for seven years under the legendary tutelage of Prof. Traditore Detestabile at the Canadian Authority for Testing Selected Highly Improbable Technologies. There, his incisive intellect permitted him to become thoroughly expert in pyrotechny without even once having to mix a composition or make a shell.

Dr. Rauchmantl now places his unrivalled talents at the disposition of shysters and litigants everywhere. Says Dr. Jeroboam Crankling, Executive Director of the American Association of Oriental Junk Importers and Regius Professor of Incompetent Arrogance at Benedict Arnold University, Blustertown, Maryland: "Rauchmantl outshines the ancient alchemists - he transmutes pain and distress into gold."\*

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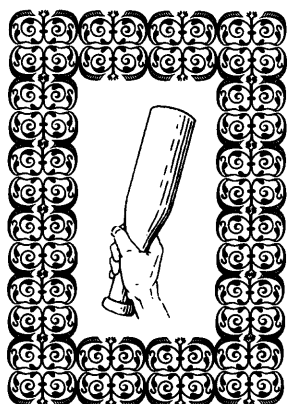
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# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et prævalebit.” – I. *Esdras*, iij: 41.

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## OXYMURIATE VINDICATED FROM THE SAFETY-FAKERS

*The mischief a secret any of them know, above the consuming of coals and drawing of usquebaugh! howsoever they may pretend. . . to commit miracles in art and treason against nature! . . . See, they begin to muster again, and draw their forces out against me! The genius of the place defend me!*

—BEN JONSON,

*Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists*

I found myself wandering aimlessly on a strange and forbidding landscape. How I came to be there I do not know, but I felt as though I had been reduced in stature almost to the vanishing point, indeed as though space and time itself had lost their usual fixed delineations. Rocks of peculiar shapes and hues dotted the ground, while the only sign of life was something flying far above – whether a gnat or an eagle I cannot say. So disoriented was I that this could have been a vast alien desert, or it could have been the humble floor of my own laboratory.

After stumbling over the rough terrain for hours, I sat down to rest near a most unusual rock. It appeared to be a perfect crystal, colorless and larger than any of the other miscellaneous fragments strewn about. Despite its beauty it gave me a vague sense of uneasiness, so rather than try to handle it I merely gazed at it in fascination. After a period of time I fancied that its sharp edges began to soften and that a mist rose ever so gradually from its surface. I rubbed my weary eyes, certain I was beginning to hallucinate, yet even as I fought to deny this vapour it grew thicker and broader and taller until it towered above me.

As I sat speechless with astonishment the apparition developed limbs, then a head, complete with mouth and eyes. Fortunately it did not seem hostile, for I was completely unable to move and could not have run away if I tried. This dreadful

suspense was shattered when the spirit made a hideous moan and began to speak:

Woe is me, yes, WOE is me! Is there not one who will defend my honour from those who would ruin me? Must I die not only prematurely, but in disgrace? I have given you, yes YOU, and your colleagues excellent service for lo, these many years. Certainly I can be fractious and high-spirited, and intolerant of bungling, but these same peccadilloes are quietly overlooked in others. I am openly snubbed and slandered, while my poor cousin de Bario is so persecuted he is rarely seen in public. Some will not receive him in private, this despite the fact that his work is never surpassed and seldom equalled. We are forced into the shadow of this languid newcomer who reeks of hartshorn and who, like certain “Bohemian” artists, requires dubious company to deliver an adequate performance. My cousins and I are not allowed to keep such company and are constantly put on the defensive. Yet we are discreetly employed, often through foreign agents, by some who pretend to despise us. I cannot abide such ignominy any longer, and would sooner depart with the proverbial blaze of glory. I shall visit my old acquaintances once again, and we shall make our voices heard. Remember my name and fear it for I am

CLORATO DI POTASSIO

Having delivered this remarkable soliloquy, the spirit vanished in a clap of thunder – deep and forceful, yet pleasingly sharp around the edges.

The author found himself in his own bed, and was just beginning to reflect on his singular dream when he realized that smoke still lingered in the room! Let no one judge too hastily, much less suggest an overdose of Jack Daniel’s or other powerful medicaments. We are not living in the “Age of Reason”; this is the late twentieth century and supernatural events are apparently quite common. Even so sensible a businessman as the author’s great un-

cle Ebenezer (how the government could have used his skills these past three decades!) was troubled by ghosts on one occasion. Far more fashionable observers have reported spooks, specters, out-of-body experiences, indeed visitors from other planets\* who defy the laws of physics! Besides, if inanimate objects did not have minds of their own, we would not need the DEA and the BATF to protect us from them.

It may have been just such a visitation which inspired Ben Jonson to write *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists*. As we all know, many of the alchemists were mountebanks or charlatans who extracted their gold from gullible patrons, while contriving to stay in the good graces of political poohbahs. Others were perfectly sincere and set the highest goals for themselves, but their command of practical chemistry was unfortunately tenuous. Today it is the *safety-fakers* who accuse our venerable old friend Chlorate of doing both more and less than it really can. This bodes ill indeed, for in many technical fields the safety-fakers are already the predominant force and sometimes their word is law.

In medicine, for example, a few legitimate breakthroughs seem to have inspired a host of foolish bugbears and fables about older methods. There is a widespread notion that anything can be rendered idiot-proof if only enough research and development is done, a notion which is extremely profitable to those able to exploit it. Thus we find that

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\*FOOTNOTE.: It would appear that our completely innocent use of the word "saucers" in an earlier article has revived a longstanding controversy over mysterious luminosities in the firmament. Consultation with the learned Herr Pfantodt, together with the words of Dulcamara, inspired further research which has led to most interesting conclusions.

While their speculations about government secrets were thought-provoking and quite plausible, what we know about the Federal government is quite frightening enough. Especially significant are the strange experimental aircraft designed in the 1950's and '60's, some of which are now declassified. Uncounted millions were squandered on machines which bore a striking resemblance to the popular conception of an alien spacecraft, or vice versa. Just which group of space-cadets came first may be irrelevant and is difficult to ascertain at this late date.

Also to be considered is the issue of conspiracies and cover-ups which, while seen readily by some, probably do exist. It appears that certain self-appointed experts, although addelegated, have no intent to deceive; they merely jumble their facts in a haphazard manner. When this happens it is possible to reach conclusions which are almost exactly opposite from the truth. Some claim the government suppresses information about U.F.O.s. To this author it seems clear that our bureaucrats have attempted to suppress information about fireworks, while attempting to construct UFOs.

T.B.B.

every new tranquilizer in the past fifty years has been touted as "less addictive". The latest ones are so very refined that countless loyal patients take them for years and refuse to give them up. Chloroform was known to be more toxic than ether from the very beginning; then its sinister reputation was enhanced by those promoting patented anæsthetics such as halothane. Today there are newer derivatives which purport to be improvements on halothane. Chloroform has been abandoned by all except television kidnappers; it is so dreaded that even a trace in a throat lozenge is now taboo. Yet, *mirabile dictu*, recent mortality rates from anæsthesia are almost exactly the same as they were from chloroform in the 1860's.

Our readers are doubtless aware of the German car which was said to jump into gear and run through walls all by itself. Before that the "Corvair" was driven from the market, although it is not drastically different from other rear-engined automobiles. For the almighty television camera, a pickup truck believed to explode in accidents was rigged so that it did, in fact, ignite when hit from the side. Even horse-and-buggy thinkers should note the broader implications of such trends.

To embrace a substance for its desirable properties while ignoring inherent undesirable properties could be regarded as "treason against nature". It is not sensible to believe one can inhale chlorinated hydrocarbons without any danger to the heart or liver. Nor is it likely that easily ignited, high-energy mixtures can ever be handled, as Weingart said, like so much sand or cement.

When investing considerable time and money in colored star shells, one may wish to avoid materials which decrease performance, or which require specialized priming methods, toxic catalysts, gooey binders and noxious solvents. In the vast majority of cases one can enjoy the full and glorious performance of chlorates without the unseemly addition of sulphur or sulphides. Some of the cautions about "deathmix" appear to be well founded; the author placed a fist-sized mass of the green version in a plastic bag over two summer days, and found that it turned brown and filled the bag with gas. Obviously one should never leave it dampened, but the same is true without the chlorate. Since we do recognize such practical safety precautions, might we not have a modicum of sport with them? This could serve several purposes: it would horrify the safety-fakers as well as being another good excuse to make bombs. Best of all, it would help point out that the margin of safety with ordinary chlorate/resin compositions is really quite good.

With these goals in mind, the author proposes a PGI seminar and demonstration to be entitled *Oxymuriate Vindicated from the Safety-Fakers*. It would consist of wilful and premeditated use of chlorate in practically every application where it is not "sup-



posed" to be employed. Perchlorates would be banned outright, while black powder would be confined to propelling, bursting and priming functions. All colors, reports, streamers and special effects would have a mandatory chlorate content, perhaps 30%, while most would contain sulphur or metal powders as well.

It is interesting to note that the highly-regarded Japanese still use chlorate and sulphur colors in their best chrysanthemum shells which they retain for their own use. Chlorate/magnesium stars are most impressive. Perhaps we should avoid Kentish's realgar star mixtures, although even these might be tried in a small rocket. Picric acid colors, while offering few if any advantages, should be included for the sake of completeness. Sodium chlorate can be used for amber and orange stars; it generally gives a moderate burning rate and is not as exciting as some published accounts suggest. Somewhat less forgiving is a Maltese green flash composition containing barium chlorate, German black aluminum, sulphur, and antimony trisulphide.

Chlorate fountains are surprisingly reliable, as are Roman candles using the old sulphur colors, and even chlorate rockets are not out of the question. Of course the main attraction would be the aerial bombs; especially important is a sufficiency of reports and bottom shots, both plain and fancy.

Needless to say, the utmost care will be required in such an endeavor. While we will be observing *real* safety rules, such as being a long way away from the buried mortars, any accident could result in terminal embarrassment. Flowerpots and detonations are common enough in PGI competition, not to mention professional displays, but even one in the chlorate exhibition would certainly be blamed on the composition. Bearing this in mind, the display might well include:

- Chlorate fountains and other tube items
- Chlorate whistles in shells
- Chlorate twinklers (??) in a rocket or shell
- 4" and larger peonies with chlorate/sulphur stars
- 5" Lampblack w/blue sattuines and colored bottom shot
- 3" or larger Magnesium colors with reports
- 5" Shell-of-Shells to Silver spider or electric spreader crossettes
- Dark reports or dark sattuines in various combinations
- Green rosettes with red bottom shot
- 6" Green "deathmix" chrysanthemum(s)

For the finale, a prominent Teutonic member has suggested a volley of six-inch double-ring rosette shells with full sized chlorate, aluminum and sulphur bottom shots. The author has been dreaming

of an eight-inch eleven timed reports as the final shell, but as this presentation is only in the planning stage, there is ample time for suggestions. If other members should desire a 10" or 12" chlorate report, we must consider it with all the gravity inherent in an educational public service. ☞

T. BABINGTON BRIMSTONE



## HAPPINESS, LONGEVITY, PROSPERITY

Harry Fong and I were chatting in the open dining area of his famous Red Lantern Restaurant in Fargo. I treat myself to a plate of his delicious Gold Dragon Chops each year after the PGII convention. Harry is 78 but still lots of fun.

"Great chow Harry, I..."

An unusual staccato sound turned my head towards a sunlit corner where a pall of white smoke hung over a table occupied by two grand old Chinese dowagers.

"What's the funny noise, Harry?"

Now I smelled something strangely familiar.

"Just my two great aunts shooting their old incense tea crackers" Harry said.

My mind immediately went into a label-collecting mode. I've told Harry about my hobby many times, but he only giggles.

"They must have brought over a supply when they came over from the old country last month."

"I didn't know you still had relatives over there, Harry."

"Yeah, plenty, but not too many of these old Cantonese nobility from the Fushan district."

My heart began to pound and my throat dried up immediately.

"Would you please ask one of your great aunts if they might spare me a package of those crackers they are shooting?" I faintly croaked. "Tell them I'll give any favor or pay any amount."

"Sure, and I'll introduce you too" said a smiling Harry as he took me over to their elegant, ivory-topped table. "Horst, this is my great aunt Mei Lei and my other great aunt Yin. Yin and Mei Lei, Horst."

I studied the old ladies carefully. Dressed in ancient silk clothes and with huge jeweled hairdos and tightly bound feet, they each wore a strange, heavy gold finger ring with a peculiar hook on the bottom for hanging the long strings of tiny crackers.

"Very nice to meet you." I said.

But before they could reply, Harry leaned over and whispered something to Yin. Without hesitation, she smiled and reached into an ornate gold-

and-red box and handed him an object about the size of those boxes that windshield wiper blades come in. Harry nonchalantly flipped the narrow package into my shaking hand.

"Let's finish eating and not bother these ladies anymore."

Flustered, I thanked them as best I could. Then we both bowed and left.

I wolfed down the rest of the meal, but was so nervous I damn near spilled my plum wine on the gorgeous pack of old crackers.

"I've got to go, Harry," I stammered, "but I'll definitely call you tomorrow."

I drove home like a maniac to look carefully at my prize. The package was about a foot long and about 1/2 inch square at the ends. The wrapper was of the thinnest glassine ricepaper impressed in-taglio with tiny lions. The 13-colored label, by far the most detailed and ornate I have ever seen, said "Baby Lotuses Brand" and "Yut Shing Quality Fushan" at the bottom. A scrolled dragon tail contained the tiny numbers 10/400. I carefully pried open just enough glue to peek at the crackers. Never in all my days of collecting have I seen anything like them. Yes, 10 strings of 400 braided crackers that each measured only 3/16 inch long and 1/32 inch wide. Each cracker had an outer wrap of finest gold leaf and was tied on both ends with silk string as fine as human hair!

I couldn't resist. With the aid of a magnifying glass, I carefully picked one of the tiny crackers loose from the middle of a string and touched the tiny fuse with a glowing wire. There was a soft, but still sharply discernable "pop" and a tiny puff of smoke rose from the tiny pile of red paper. My God! How do they lace that gunpowder with incense! Unbelievable!

I called Harry immediately and asked if the old empresses would mind if I interviewed them the next day about their unusual crackers and how and when they acquired them.

"Why ask them? Why not ask great uncle Yut? He's the one who brought them over here when he had to move his business out of the district because of the new city regulations."

"Uncle Yut?" I stammered. "What does he do?"

"Well, I thought you of all people should know, with your goofy hobby and all. He is Yut Shing."

Harry must have sensed my shock as I stammered "Y-Y-Yut Shing?" I faintly hissed. "He is here?"

"Yeah, even though the old geezer is 102, he made me let him set up a temporary shop here in the basement. You know, Chinese respect for the elders and all that crap."

"Could I possibly meet him?" I groaned.

"Sure, I'll let him know you're coming tomorrow."

Needless to say, I couldn't sleep at all that night.

I kept repeating the name of the famous old fireworker that no collector except myself must know was alive. I dreamt about getting a complete interview with Yut, maybe some old pictures of his many factories from back in the 1920's, and writing an article that would make my old buddy Nivolo's eyes bug out more than mine did when he showed me his collection. I got up about 20 times to write down more questions and carefully took some of my oldest Yut Shing material out of my collection.

It still seems like a dream, but at 9 a.m. Harry said "Just go downstairs and knock. He always gets his girls working by 5 a.m."

I knocked and a pretty young girl answered the door.

"Yes?"

"I would like to see Mr. Shing if he isn't too busy."

After a minute a thin but spry old man in a long robe appeared. He was carrying a long staff and his wispy beard draped over a huge pomegranate held under one arm. Several bats fluttered momentarily, then quickly landed back on the crook of the staff before hanging upside down. Yut clapped his hands and the young girl scrambled off for tea.

"Young Harry say you like planty firecracker!" he laughed. "O.K. you come in I show."

The large basement smelled of incense, exotic dyes, and hot tea. Dozens of young girls labored over low tables filled with paper and little piles of gray powder. Some worked long crescent-shaped knives suspended from frames while others labored over ancient printing presses and paper cutters. Middle-aged women boiled the fine dyes while others crushed and sifted gunpowder through 12,000-mesh screens made of the finest panda hair. Two of the oldest women used a sense of touch only attained through 70 years experience to roll the fine powder into threadlike fuses.

Yut guided me to a table where a young girl took the pomegranate and sliced it so we could eat it with our tea.

I told Yut that I had been collecting firecrackers for many years because I thought the manufacturing process was ingenious and the labels were among the world's finest examples of folk art. I showed him some of his gorgeous labels from my collection. He seemed mildly interested. I asked him how he got started in the business.

"I now make firecrackers many 86 years see my Lion treadmork. Watch for peccuriar people imitate but not genu wine."

"I see. Why did you decide to come to Fargo, North Dakota of all places?"

"No can more shoot firecracker in Canton and purucrats like much too paperwork and want people buy cheap goods from state-own Horse and Link Triad."

What are you making here now?"

"I make all 84 lightning firecrackers registered brands from 1919 beware all imitations. On July 1st I commence using labels but bring many labels from 1903 to 1911 and old all lithograph stone to print and proof Lion trademark. You want see old label?"

"Y-Y-Yes" I stammered "and I would like to buy as many different packs and labels as you have for my collection."

"O.K., you come."

Yut had constructed new label bins from empty Campbell's soup boxes. He had glued a label to each slot and also marked each bin in Chinese with the brand, year of first use, and the cracker size and content. True to his word, he had brought perhaps 350-500 of each label. Lithograph plates were stored in an ancient cabinet, and wall shelves held stacks of finished crackers of all the different brands.

"I got big problem no one recognize my Lion trademark and no 50 minigrom D.O.T. sticker for fast-lead fuse do not hold in hand since I sell no firecrackers U.S. since 1937."

"Do not worry about that Yut, I'll be able to sell lots of your firecrackers and labels to fellow collectors while you get your new labels ready."

Yut gave me a broad, beaming smile.

"O.K. you come tomorrow. I get 100, that 48 packages our count, of every brand ready you sell and keep 10 percent money. You want extra label?"

"That would be great. Twenty five of each brand should do it."

"O.K." said Yut brightly, "That make 12 of each our count."

To my everlasting disappointment and frustration, that was the last I ever saw of Yut. The next morning all that remained of his little shop were blackened basement walls and a floor scattered with a few broken lithographic plates. A customer at the Red Lantern, a retiree from the Consumer Product Safety Commission, now an official with the National Fire Prevention Association and a volunteer worker with the Citizens for Handgun Control, had smelled what he thought was gunpowder and noticed bits of charred red paper near one of the dining tables. He immediately phoned in an anonymous tip about a possible underground bomb factory.

At 2 a.m. the following day, and with no warrant of any kind, eighty-five B.A.T.F. agents in full body armor burst into the shop. Withering automatic rifle fire, nerve gas, and special incendiary fragmentation grenades instantly killed everyone inside and consumed most flammable materials. At exactly 2:02 the agents retreated and the high-pressure nozzles for the jelled hexane/magnesium/per-manganate deployers inserted through the ventilation system were opened. Thirty seconds later the

ultrasound generators fired and all substances containing calcium instantly disassociated to a fine amorphous powder.

In a brief press release that alluded to tons of high explosive materials and a plot to destroy democracy, John Smith, B.A.T.F. assistant deputy to the acting secretary for interim affair operations and event protocol, stated "Although we found no evidence that the basement was occupied, traces of nitrate bomb materials were found in several areas. The operation, although extremely complex, went very smoothly. Citizen input such as displayed in this sinister conspiracy increases our job effectiveness and saves valuable tax money that our Bureau sorely needs for staff increases and equipment modernization."

HORST KNALLKÖRPER



## A BAD CASE OF GAS

It has long been known that gasoline and related petroleum distillates, when properly oxygenated, have considerable work potential. This can be used gradually, as in an internal combustion engine, or more suddenly, as employed by fuel-air explosive devices, which our R&D department is now looking into. The ultimate potential of volatile liquids when properly oxygenated may be yet to be discovered, yet a series of experiments conducted by this author, as well as his ne'er-do-well assistants, should elucidate the general degree to which the process of oxygenation contributes to the detonation potential of volatile liquids.

The Beginnings: In my younger days I had a penchant for racing about in go-carts. Not your average putt-putt, mind you, but the kind that used chain-saw engines and would accelerate to seventy in the wink of the eye. It used a mixture of oil and gasoline, being a two-stroke engine, and after I'd mis-mixed a couple gallons of fuel that I'd had to discard down the sewer, I learned my first lesson.

Friend and fellow black-sheep Tom Sawyer (his real name, no kidding), was along that day, hoping to get a ride. Disappointed, and being a firebug by nature, Tommy flipped a match into the sewer grate. Great tongues of flame, garnished by towers of black smoke, licked at the utility wires above, and so we did the only sensible thing - we ran like hell. Mind you, this was not an explosion, but merely a lowly sewer fire. A deflagration and nothing more, although mildly amusing.

I've never understood Sawyer's preoccupation with fires, nor he mine with explosions, but we had a

common passion for advanced juvenile delinquency; an agreeable symbiosis. Sawyer always carried a pocketfull of strike-anywhere matches with him, a term he took at face value. You'd never know where or when his next conflagration would turn up. Take your eyes off Tommy for a moment, and you'd be smelling smoke and running like hell the next.

In the Autumn, a resplendent yet bittersweet season for New Englanders, citizens raked their leaves into towering piles, all to be collected by huge vacuum trucks. Not to be outdone by city trucks, Tom and I rode bicycles about the town, Tom tossing a trusty wooden match into a large leaf cache periodically. When we'd set several blazes, we'd adjourn to the top of Elephant Rock and smoke a joint, savoring the chaos. If only Tommy had a fiddle . . . . His eyes gleamed in a way that worried even me. Yet still . . . . a mere fire.

I was beginning to think I might convert Tommy to a powderhead one evening after we'd just watched Sergeant Saunders cremate a Kraut tank with a Molotov Cocktail. Great show: *Combat*. There are several forms of Molotov Cocktail, and against my urgings, Tom decided to emulate Sgt. Saunders, and stuff a rag in a bottle of gasoline and throw it. I had felt that the fuse should be attached to the outside, so as to ignite the device only when it breaks. We should've done it my way. Tom and I took the "Backyard Express", our way of travelling at night without being detected from the road, where Officer Maccini drove his prowler car, to our target for the evening, Bates School, where we had suffered our elementary years.

Sawyer lit his Molotov, brought his left leg up high, cocking his right arm back to the throwing position, the target being the Bates gymnasium. As the bottle followed his cocking arm, the gasoline sloshed backwards, dislodging the burning rag and showering Tom with gasoline. The burning rag fell to his hip, where it started him afire. Tommy danced a blazing, screeching jig, leaping high into the air and hopping and whirling furiously, all the time tearing at his Levi jacket, the whole spectacle illuminating the neighborhood nicely. Lights came on. Astonished neighbors peered out their doors and windows at what to them must have seemed a Buddhist Monk running amok in flames. Sawyer finally ripped his jacket off and sprinted onto a dewy lawn, extinguishing himself and ending his fiery fandango.

He emerged from the wet grass relatively intact, all considered. Unfortunately, his shoulder-length hair was reduced to a stubby stench on the right side of his head. I suppose today such a coiffing might be considered fashionable, but at the time it was awkward to say the least. Tom took to wearing odd hats to cover his blistered right ear and neck, and had he not been such an accomplished

and dreaded street-fighter, he would certainly have taken considerable disparagement from his peers. And however painfully amusing, again, all we had created was a damned fire. Just not enough fuel-air intimacy of mixture, luckily for Tommy, but things were about to change.

After considerable healing and mending on Tom's part from our Molotov, we once again set about our work. Tom's sweet and romantic memory of our sewer fire had led us to dedicate the evening to an even more robust and majestic recreation of same. We prowled the neighborhood like cats in the night, stealing gasoline cans for lawnmowers, snowblowers, etc., until we had a BUNCH, pouring it all down one sewer grate. We pillaged every garage we could open, and threw the empty cans over a lilac hedge. We had to stop when we couldn't throw another can over for it clanging against another can. Too much noise.

Tom looked at me with something like fear, withdrawing a wooden match from his pocket. Obviously, it was just too much gas and we'd gone way too far. Yet to desert such an inviting inferno would be unthinkable.

We took several steps back and Tom started throwing matches at the sewer grate. The matches clinked to one or another side of the grate and went out without fail. Although it was late fall, we poured sweat and cringed between each match toss. Tom was down to his last match. He lit it and threw it at the grate, where it danced and died defiantly.

Our shoulders fell. What now? Had we more sense, we'd have left it alone and gone home. Call it sewer pollution, what the hell. But that's never been our way, and Tom vanished into the woods, towards his house, to fetch more matches. I blended into the shadows and waited. I'd guess it took Tom a good ten minutes, probably closer to fifteen, to return with a pack of matches. Tom wondered if the gas was still down there. We couldn't smell it, but I knew it had to be. Tom wasn't convinced. He sauntered up to the grate, casually flicking a match toward it, seemingly daring it to ignite. It did better than that. The match bounced once and fell into the abyss, and Hell followed with it.

Colossal columns of flame leapt high into the night sky as our bones were shaken, ankle to skull, by the heaving explosion in the road beneath us. Trying to regain our balance, we looked around wildly and saw gouts of flame spring from every sewer in sight, the blast racketting through the neighborhood. Manhole covers and sewer grates took flight in streams of fire. Then the streetlights expired, which was about when all the awful clanging began. The heavy, dull, metallic thuds were the sewer grates and manhole covers descending out of the night sky that we'd sent them to. No way to

see them or dodge them, and so our sweat poured until their echoes died out. And then we ran. Not a trot, mind you. We broke into terrified sprints back to our houses. I shinnied up the gutter pipe and into bed with not a moment to spare. My father, already thoroughly disgusted with my interests, lumbered in to question me about the blast. I shrugged and offered that a transformer on a utility pole had blown and caused the blackout.

More than that had blown. Tom and I had inadvertently created the greatest carburetor in the world. By serendipitously allowing the gasoline to vaporize and permeate the sewer systems of Pilgrim and Rutgers Roads, we'd flooded the systems with not merely combustible liquids, but explosive gasses.

The effects were far-reaching. The electricity died for blocks, the water lines burst, but most exquisitely of all, the overpressures in the sewer system sent the sewer contents back along the line to their sources. Kevin McKinney told me that his Dad was literally thrown from the throne when it happened. He was showered with high-pressure sewage of a frightful nature while simultaneously being plunged into darkness by the power failure. Mr. McKinney's bellows brought Kevin, with a flashlight, only to find Mr. Mac sitting on the tile floor, sodden with newspaper in hand, clad in only an old undershirt, mired in excrement that continued to drip down on him from the ceiling. Mr. Mac was unhappy. Unhappier still to discover the water mains broke. No way to wash up. Kevin's epic struggles against both gorge and laughter at seeing his father in such a state were ultimately lost, which was good eventually for one ticket to the woodshed. I've always wondered how widespread the overpressure effect was, and how many people shared Mr. Mac's fate.

Tom and I lived in terror for days, realizing we had caused a major neighborhood catastrophe, and dreaded the visit of Officer Maccini, which we knew would come sooner or later. We tried to tell ourselves that they'd just think it was a natural gas leak gone bad, but we realized that sooner or later someone would glance over that lilac hedge and discover the real cause. Yet Maccini never showed up at all. After all, why should he? We had long ago learned, as Milano has counseled, "Never tell a copper nothin'." And Paul Maccini had run out of scams. We had learned that no matter how many witnesses he claimed, no matter how many false fingerprints, whatever interrogation techniques used, that we would always survive by operating on the assumption that the police are lying to you. A sad commentary, but true. After all, I'm still a free man, and I oughtn't be, not by a long shot.

Remember, laws are only for those that get caught.

EDUARDO TELLERINI

## ALLOCUTION OF THE RT. VEN. EDUARDO TELLERINI, G.C.C.

My good friends and companions of the I.O.O.J., it is my pleasure to address you for the first time as President of our order, my having been sworn in, in due and ancient form, by the Rt. Venerable Bianco Gasolini.

I am pleased to report that the state of the I.O.O.J. is good. We have inducted many new companions, all Fireworks People; folks with knowledge of and skill with pyrotechnic endeavor.

To those that would wish us away, I bear sad news. The I.O.O.J. is growing, healthy, and meaner than ever. Our ranks swell with those true practitioners of fireworks. We leave behind and amuse ourselves with you, our detractors: the ignorant, the bombastic, the iconoclastic, and the parasitic.

To those who would see us scattered to the winds, I would counsel to tread carefully, for we *are* the winds. We walk in your midst, though you may not recognize us, and we laugh at your befuddlement. Tread carefully, Dear Foes, for the Case Former of Damocles looms large above you.

As we grow, so do our capabilities. We now have an address to which our companions, and anyone else that might learn it, may write us (No letter-bombs, please; besides, they wouldn't work. We're much better at them than you are).

Our address is: I.O.O.J.  
P.O. Box 600393  
St. Paul, MN

We welcome and answer your communications, and solicit informative or amusing articles to pass on to our Companions via *The Case-Former*.

Also, as many of you may know by now, the works of our editorial staff are being offered to the general public for the first time entitled, "The Best of *The Case-Former*", available for \$7.50 by writing our P.O. Box. The proceeds will be used for our Grand Manifestations and for the general bedevilment and torment of our detractors.

I wish formally to greet and laud the additions of Companions T. Babington Brimstone and Antonio Gianslavi to our editorial staff, both being fine writers as well as pyrotechnists.

It was a pleasure to induct so many fine new people into our Order at our Fargo ceremony. As usual, the affair was highlighted by free-wheeling fireworks (nobody was injured), copious gunfire, abundant food and drink, and general merriment, with not an orange vest to be found.

Special thanks go to Companions Giustiziare and Angelina Fiammante, who generously hosted our party, as well as to Cam Starr, for hosting the P.G.I.I. convention and announcing the founding of the N.F.A., a badly needed influence in the fire-

works industry, which has the complete support of the I.O.O.J. (if you think it'll help, Cam).

Despite the mosquitoes, Fargo was a success for the P.G.I.I. We owe much more than most know to Pete Cermak, Irv Haman, Randy Pritchard, Ed Vanasek, Steve Coman, and so many more whose tireless efforts got the show in the air.

The Hop Kee demonstration, of course, was one of the highlights of Fargo. Fireworks have been shot slowly by themselves, in unison, and synched electronically to music, but the application of chaos mathematical theory to fireworks was a stroke of genius.

I was beginning to despair of the Safety Committee's rejection of unorthodox display techniques, but they have at last redeemed themselves. Under their dedicated and vigilant auspices, lift powder was poured into the bottoms of mortars with loose-fitting end plugs, from which it promptly spilled through to the ground, and the short-lifted shells were allowed to be shot in this configuration. It is gratifying to see the Safety Committee attaining the same exemplary professionalism as the B.A.T.F. or D.O.T, harping on the picayune and shrugging vapidly at the terrifying.\* We miss you, Mr. Sprague.

In closing, I believe we can look forward to an active year, and I wish to thank all of you who make up our Order for your dedicated support. We all know one another, even if we've never met, by our reverence for, and dedication to, the art of fireworks. You are the people that keep fireworks alive in their truest spirit, and though ours is a light-hearted assemblage, I pledge solemnly to you that I will work constantly to further our cause, and to provide, in the I.O.O.J., a home for those that share our passion for shaking the earth and painting the sky with fire. 🍀

EDUARDO TELLERINI

\* *Welcome to the new P.G.I.I.!*



## THE WHISTLING BITCH

All of us have heard someone whistle before, but how does the pyrotechnic whistle work? Imagine a strobe pulsing between 600 and 16,000 times a second. The sound produced by this oscillation would be high-pitched but would also vary in frequency because a strobe does not have a steady beat, and neither does a whistle. The sound of the whistle is made when air is moved as the composition burns on and off causing a vibrating effect. We interpret this as noise or sound. Because the frequency at which it oscillates varies so greatly, a

whistle can work in tubes which are different in diameter and length.

Is there an upper and lower pitch limit? Make a very small one and ask your dog if he (she or it) heard it, because we as humans can hear only a limited range of sounds. While bats and small rodents hear very high sounds, animals such as elephants and most large birds are able to hear sounds so low, that we need sophisticated electronic equipment to detect those sounds even though such sounds might be very loud. I don't have that kind of equipment to detect those sounds so what the hell do I know? I can say that different types of whistle mix will probably yield different results. Which type do I prefer? If it's dangerous and pisses people off, I probably use it. My favorite whistle mix is potassium chlorate and sodium benzoate, with 4 percent additional fine titanium sponge and 1 percent additional red iron oxide. In the particular size tube I use (1 inch i.d.), it's the loudest whistling bitch around.

If you have a rodent problem or an ugly dog, try using potassium picrate or gallic acid. If you are not a member of the I.O.O.J. you're probably used to using large amounts of Vaseline (ask anyone from Iowa).

Please use caution when making any kind of whistle because certain ones are more sensitive than others. I use all wooden tools when I hand-ram mine, however, a good hydraulic press is in the planning. With the help of *Shaggy's* brother *Darrell*, I now have the ability to make 3 inch diameter whistles using a mortar (not a cheap plastic one either). It's best to bury these in the ground to keep the vibration to a limit or else the composition will fragmentate and there goes six pounds of good hooter as a salute.

How big can we make them? I have yet to find that out. Maybe *Milano* can be talked into building an 8 inch ram for me. I think I'll ask him next time we meet. After all, whoever said "size should have limit" sure ain't no *Tellerini*, only a *jiggery-pokery*. 🍀

PAUL VERONNE



## REMODELING BOY SCOUT CAMP

(ED. NOTE: With this issue The Case Former is pleased to welcome as a contributor Antonio Gianslavi, the promising son of our illustrious 'Malevolent Artificer,' Milano Gianslavi. A true chip off the old blockbuster!)

Every summer my good friend Guido Omerta and I have the opportunity to spend a week camp-

ing with the local boy scout troop. The daily activities are for the most part enjoyable, with a variety of merit badges and the like that can be earned. However, it is the night games we live for. Almost every night, we challenge some other troop to play war games, usually capture the flag. For many years our troop have gone undefeated in the games, causing much jealousy from other troops. We are in fact so good that other troops have resorted to cheating and occasionally physical violence upon the younger scouts to gain a victory.

After one such an evening, Guido and I were sitting by the dying campfire thinking of ways to get revenge upon those who so desperately deserve it.

"Wouldn't it be great," Guido suggested, "to blow up their latrine?"

As soon as he suggested the idea, I knew it would be perfect. The latrine was the center of life at camp. It was a small square building with four wooden walls, a plastic roof, a wooden floor, and the pit below to hold what was left of the unidentified stuff we ate in the mess hall. Over the years, we had pulled a number of practical jokes, but this would put the icing on the cake and give revenge a whole new meaning.

That night, Guido and I prepared ourselves for the adventure. We donned our completely black military fatigues, face masks, and gloves. A short while later, we were on our way to the enemy campsite with a book of matches, a candle, and a couple pounds of carbide from the quartermaster's supply tent. We sneaked quietly into the campsite, located the latrine, and made sure that there was no one around. We had decided earlier that Guido would stand watch and I would do the dirty work. I went into the latrine, down to the farthest stall, and dropped all the carbide we had into the farthest stall. A soft bubbling noise told me that I had hit liquid and acetylene gas was being produced. Moving back to the nearest stall, I set the candle in a good spot and lit it. We hoped that by the time the acetylene reached the candle, the entire pit would be full of it, and that the gas would blow the thing sky-high. As soon as I was done, we went back to camp as fast as we could without being noticed, for we wanted to be in our tent when it went off. Our only concern was that some scout might get up, wonder what the burning candle was for, and blow it out. Soon after we were in our tents, we were rewarded with a soft boom echoing through camp. As I fell asleep, I could still hear Guido softly chuckling in the darkness.

The next morning, in the mess hall, our success was confirmed by the absence of the entire troop whose campsite we had hit. Nothing was said for the rest of the week, and neither Guido nor I were

brave or stupid enough to go investigate the damage we had caused. We left camp wondering how well our prank had actually worked.

Although we thought it was over, our true reward came the next year. Our troop was assigned to that campsite, and when Guido and I first arrived in camp, we found, among many other things, a brand new latrine.

ANTONIO GIANSLAVI

## SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

*News Notes From All Around*

It has been rumored that the following advertisement appeared recently in "The Predawn Leftist," China's favorite scandal rag:

WANTED: Locket expert. Must have high degree, or velly smart, or think smart, or say smart. Must not be razy, must work hard, razy person not wanted. Do not want browhead, or windbag, or ballage barroon with mouth sewn on. We need locket expert, make BIG locket, have big tube. GOOD PAY, rotza lice, and flied or loast lat. Apply by post to Locket Ministry, 666 Rirry Rorry Pop Rane, Peking.

Gee, I wonder who they got?

MILANO

It has been learned that the KSI has been dispatched to Singapore, its mission the training of Defense Ministry Personnel. This piece of highly unlikely news led us to place calls of inquiry to an I.O.O.J. agent highly placed in western military intelligence circles. He was able to confirm for us that this is actually a covert CIA mission to hopelessly cripple the strategic thermonuclear Saturn missile battery program of Singapore. Moreover, it has been learned that KSI has been training for such missions for some time, and is known to the CIA formally as KSI MF, or Klutz Sabotage Impossible Mission Force.

While the State Department expressed reserve over a possible international incident, if not an actual thermonuclear exchange between the U.S. and Singapore, CIA is confident that with KSI there to help them, no Singapore missile could conceivably reach our shores, even if shipped.

As usual, if any of the KSI MF should be caught or killed, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of their actions, if he can keep a straight face.

We are saddened to learn of the death of Dennis Manochio after a long illness. A New York na-

tive, Dennis moved to California, where his business was gourmet foods.

Perhaps best noted as an historian, researcher, and collector of Fireworks, Manochio founded the Fourth of July Americana and Fireworks Museum, which we all hope will survive him.

We regret the delay in the announcement of Dennis' passing, but it co-incided almost exactly with the issuance of the previous *Case-Former*. Hopefully no inference is to be drawn from the fact. ☞



## THE MALEVOLENT ARTIFICER

*"By their works ye shall know them."*

—JESUS

Now and then Milano thinks, "there really isn't anybody so dumb as to try some of the things I write about, is there?" Well, I think I may have an answer. There must be a group of people, who not having as prestigious a publication as the *Case-Former* in which to share their expertise, that insist on trying to bewilder the tyro pyrotechnician with demonstrations of their skill.

At the last convention we witnessed a demonstration of the coveted muzzle break shell. This was done only to give the viewing audience something of which to be envious. Milano himself overheard some of the natives in attendance say "Gollee, lookit that will-ya boy, hell, anybody can shoot them things uppin the air, it takes skill to make-em blow up like them fellas."

It was now crystal clear — never instruct as Milano does, just give sterling performances and let the envious wallow in self pity and ignorance.

This scheme might have worked, but for the fact Milano is too good a mechanic and saw through their now previously unknown technique.

I have decided to name this "the IDIOTS OUT WALKING AROUND" muzzle bursting mortar" in honor of some present at its premiere.

Directions are as follows: cut some steel pipe four inches inside diameter to a length of thirty inches. Next bend a piece of one half inch iron rod as follows: measure off twelve inches and bend a right angle four and a quarter inches and bend parallel to the other leg; cut the leg equal to the first; you should now have a long U shaped piece. This piece is now placed over the end of the tube so the legs lay alongside the tube about four inches or so and this is welded in place; this should leave an eight inch gap from the muzzle to the crossbar.

Next cut a piece of half inch plate four inches square and weld to the crossbar parallel to the muzzle. This can also be welded at a forty-five degree

angle to give a fan effect that can be aimed. Now you have it; the secret's out; you too can hold your head high with the best of the best.

Some of you may be thinking "Milano's slipped a gear, there's no bottom to this mortar." Get this—you don't need one; just put it in a hole, pack well, throw in a handful of powder, drop in an unlifted shell, more powder, and fire with the dross of a fusee. ☞

MILANO GIANSLAVI



## PLUMBING WITH GUNPOWDER II: OR, THE ANTI-SEPTIC EXPLOSIONS

Recently I read in *The Case Former* an article about plumbing with gunpowder, and the marvelous results of this new drain-cleaner. While I have never tried this, I did see some remarkable results in clearing my septic systems. May I say, they had rather explosive results.

The first attempt was by my crazy commie neighbor. Let me explain, years ago when he was constructing his house, he had a hill created by using landfill — read *junk* — and bulldozing dirt on top of it. One of the items that was buried was an old septic tank three-quarters filled with waste. Here it sat, peacefully rotting into oblivion, until that fateful day my pinko neighbor had lost the prime on his well and needed to drill another one. He decided that if had his adopted Chinese son do slave labor with a shovel it would save him money. After all, he figured, for every foot this kid dug it was one less foot he would have to pay for, so make the kid dig!

He rigged up a windlass and had the kid start digging. I often wondered if he might have been Vietnamese, as this kid loved to tunnel. Well, the young gook resisted getting the bends and started to dig. About five hours later he called up that he had hit bedrock and could not go any further. Now what to do?

Well, Joe Commie had served in Korea, and had brought home some souvenirs. He had rifles, blankets, and even a surplus military ambulance — but above all, he had hand grenades. He got the great idea of putting a gallon of gasoline down the hole and detonating it with a grenade. Now, as it is well known, when human waste ferments it gives off methane gas, and this tank was very, very full and ready to go. A crowd gathered to watch — after all, this was a grenade. Joe lowered the gas and prepared to drop the grenade. The resulting explosion rumbled out of the hole and a small amount of white vapor rose from it. Joe stuck his head over the hole to see what had happened. The next



sound was like the noise of an oncoming freight train. Half-fermented sewage blew out of the well and knocked old Joc on his ass. One local wag was heard to call out, "thar she blows!" It rained down on Joe, soaking every pore of his body. For weeks we could tell when he was coming even before we saw him, if the wind was right.

The next time I saw someone use some dynamite was to clear a drainage field and plumb again with gunpowder. It was when I visited a friend's cabin one summer weekend. A neighbor wanted to sell his house and so was fixing it up – new gutters, fresh white paint, a little fix here, a little fix there. One of the things he did was to pump the septic tank, and the water drains out after a settling period. The water drained into a ditched field to settle. Lots of times these become blocked and need to be cleaned out. Two methods are used – the first is with a shovel, and the second is with dynamite. The local experts chose the second. They got two cases of ditching dynamite and proceeded to blow holes in the ground. Around the settled pond that had formed the edge of the tank they spaced out about a case and a half. This was serious overkill, as they only needed a small amount. Many fuses were lit, and the resulting explosion was deafening. Our heroes were showered with mud and goo. But the worst part was that the side of the house was covered with waste and blue water, giving rise to a novel sort of exterior decoration. As the fellow who owned this house was unloved locally, the house was known by a special designation for years thereafter; as in, "you want to find the store? Go down to the shit-covered house and turn left." It took ten coats of paint before the blue water was covered enough not to bleed through, and the house never did sell.

The final experience of plumbing with gunpowder was after a friend moved his outhouse, the trench being full. That night we were having one of our bottle rocket wars when Todd announced that he had to use the privy. "It's over there," I said, forgetting it had been moved. Todd ran off in the direction of the house, and Tim (that sick jerk) fired a rocket that hit Todd square in the pratt. Todd jumped and fell face-down in the open trench, covering himself. He started to scream and rage – but none of us could help him, since we were laughing too hard. A long soak in the icy waters of a northern Minnesota lake with a bar of Lava soap removed the smell and fecal matter – but to Todd's annoyance, we continued to shoot rockets at him.

Well, as you can see, plumbing and septic systems go well with powder and we hope others will try this soon, as it is a wonderfully entertaining time.

PAOLO DA GIRO

## CALIFORNIA DREAMING

"All the leaves are brown, and the sky is grey – I went for a walk on a winter's day." Well, actually, I got on an airplane – destination: Lake Havasu and the Western Winter Blast. On a cold winter's day our discussion over whether we were going ended. We decided to go. As always when I travel for fireworks, I write a review of the gathering. Usually, this is a real easy task – the only organization that has more clowns than the P.G.I.I. is Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, and the Guild is catching up quickly. You take pen in hand and jab at the soft underbelly of the craft. A few bad jokes, and a moral or two. *Voilà*, another article in print!

I had a real problem with the W.W.B. I was not angry at anyone. I didn't feel sorry for the rank and file. What would I write about?

The W.W.B. was a gathering of the old guard. I saw people there I had not seen in years. It felt good to be amongst friends. I knew I would have a good time. The W.P.A. had its stuff together and was trying to run a class act. They even kept safety-fakery to a minimum. Little did they know how safe they were one night when several members of the I.O.O.J. were the safety committee.

I arrived on a cloudy Friday. The weather service was predicting rain. I knew it wouldn't rain during the show. After all, the fix was in. Registration was its normal chaotic mess. The buzz floating around was that *The Best of the Case-Former* would be on sale here for the first time. I was overjoyed and eager. Who cares if someone in the W.P.A. thinks we are "red-necked and racist." As the old spinach-eater said, "I yam what I yam." We are the best, we keep the traditions, we push the flap of the envelope, and we just want to have fun.

Witness Dr. Bourbonini's seminar on Groundage Effects on the Ignition of Common Class C Devices. The turnout was excellent, but more on this later.

The first night's activities were highlighted by the appearance of some leather-jacketed hoodlums. J.D.'s on a spree, water mains bursting joyfully, cracker strings on the fence. "Did you set off that string that broke the pipe?" they were asked. "No, it wasn't us, honest, trust me!" claimed the leader. "Yes, it was. I saw you leather-jacketed hoodlums." "No, lady, it wasn't us, it was one of those bums from Solon," chorused the smallest hood. "Yes, it was – I saw you do it! Great fireworks, by the way."

The first night's activity also included a great steak served by a gorgeous waitress. Yes, even the women in Lake Havasu are good-looking.

Saturday brought lectures, lunch and good times. Everywhere in the flea market people were discussing some aspect of fireworks. It was great and

I felt good. Lunch was a gathering of friends, with Lino collecting jokes. Thank you, Lino, for the laughter. That afternoon we attended the lectures. I enjoyed the talks on single and multiple break construction. They were given by people who care about what they do, and do not just repeat what a high-school chemistry text tells them. That night, while exhibitors demonstrated that even small groups of newcomers under adverse conditions (from California, with its billy-be-damned laws) could put on a good show, we assembled the Box!

Dr. Bourbonini in consultation with the other learned companions decided to lecture on the effects of groundage in Class C, confinement of same, and of course the Bourbonini method of igniting Class C. A quick consultation with the Duck Hunter yielded large numbers of display strings and other items to be included in the Box.

Sunday was a day of morons. I attended one and a half lectures. One was given by a fuse-cutter with high-school text book and his roll of degrees from the Rauchmantl Schüle – the two-ply kind. This is a new danger to the craft – knowledge without experience, worthless and overbearing. Later that night I watched a fuse-cutter transfixed watching

a morning-glory burning. He reminded me of a child staring at a wrapped package, intense and unwavering. "What are you doing?" I asked. "Looking at the sparks. This has three examples of sparks, small, large, and then small again," he said. "Yes, it's a great item," I said, "did you ever try a dozen at once?" "No, it's not the firework, it's the spark. It's a perfect example." "What are you talking about?" I asked. "I help teach the safety-faker responsibility class at the Rauchmantl Institute for Pyrotechnic Ineptitude. We need sparks to show people proper fireworks." I couldn't listen to him any more and just walked away.

That night come two fine displays. First, before the public display, with total approval of the safety committee, we ignited the Box. A can of good Brazilian powder was added and the resulting fireball scorched the earth. After this, we were witness to the W.P.A. Public Display. They did a fine job of ærial and ground work. What else do you need in Lake Havasu but beautiful women and fireworks? Well, maybe a Lust Bombe or a beer-drinking Lincoln Continental.

PAOLO DA GIRO



# VERONNE'S TOP TEN LISTS

## *Top ten reasons to attend this year's convention in New Castle. . .*

10. If you act stupid in front of anyone, all they will say is "How is everything back in Iowa?"
9. It's more fun getting drunk with the eastern safety committee.
8. To vote down the flood attire dress code.
7. To hand out lake-party mystery fire trophy.
6. Fewer mosquitoes?
5. Dago food!
4. To see if anyone remembers the last I.O.O.J. party.
3. To see who wins the most bets on dumb officer predictions.
2. Fewer consultants and more people who have actually done things.
1. Anything is better than the LaCrosse convention!!

## *Top ten reasons for not attending this year's convention in New Castle. . .*

10. Still too much Chinese shit.
9. Orange vest means "wouldn't you like to be an asshole too?"
8. Lighting class "C" items, one at a time.
7. Their accent is fake anyway.
6. Nothing could top the class "B" ground display in Fargo.
5. Dago farts!
4. Seminar by expert witness leaves you even more confused.
3. Big sale on blenders for making rocket composition.
2. Flaming clays are not on competition list.
1. Seen one super-string, you've seen them all.

*Whether you decide to go or not, you know the I.O.O.J. party always welcomes fun and good times (not necessarily something to write home to mother about).*

## *Top ten categories that should be in competition. . .*

10. Fuse cutting and lighting.
9. Flaming clays and Barts.
8. Strobe wheels that chase safety fakers.

7. Best rocket composition made in a blender.
6. Mystery fire competition.
5. Best wheel made of steel wool on the end of string swung by hand (oogle oogle).
4. Best large flaming ego.
3. Dusterwinkle candle mine.
2. Worst nomination for 1st V.P.
1. Ready box mine competition.

## *Top ten best reasons to become a safety official. . .*

10. Like to order little kids around.
9. Treat everyone like little kids.
8. The place to find the best WEED.
7. People think you work hard because you look like road construction workers. (Forgot the shovels, so we'll have to lean on each other).
6. To feel important at least one day during the year.
5. Look mom, my own golf cart!
4. So you can put your signature on any shell you want.
3. Sucking up to officers is what you do best.
2. Easier way of getting your picture in the bulletin because you can't make anything.
1. Wearing a hard hat is the best way to protect your large ego.

## *Top ten favorite memories of the I.O.O.J. . .*

10. Making examples out of idiots (publicly).
9. The "Go Getter" Mystery fire suddenly snuffed by big salute.
8. Jack Daniels and powdered sugar donuts.
7. The "oogle oogle" story.
6. Pissing in the fruit cocktail before the afterglows. (Just kidding, but I still prefer the home brew.)
5. Expert witness no longer expert business man.
4. Green-fused firecrackers that stay lit even when dropped in friend's beer glass.
3. Pin the tie on the Mountebank.
2. Charlatan tarred and feathered piñata filled with bullshit.
1. Witless guy wins broken case-former award.



## TELLERINI'S CULINARY CORNER



During the sweltering summer months, and of course the fireworks season, a Coke just doesn't make it. As an alternative that is not only relaxing but refreshing, try my martini concoction.

### *Martini Tellerini*

First, find a ripe, sweet watermelon, cut it up, and de-seed the sweetest red heart. Put the watermelon in a blender and blend, until you have a purée that is almost entirely liquid. To this, add as much vodka as you wish, or alternatively, gin or grain alcohol. Add ice. Now relax and set up a display, or shoot some fireworks.

Of course, at all too many pyrotechnic events you will encounter the ScrewPeople, those small people with big mouths, usually equipped with badges or vests, who will see you having fun. They will, of course try to put an end to this. To foil them, simply take a 60 c.c. syringe and an I.V. hypodermic needle, and inject the watermelon with vodka or grain alcohol. You'll be surprised how much a melon will absorb. And who would dream of stopping anyone from eating such a politically correct fruit? Eat it normally, and marvel at how your mood improves as you enjoy your fireworks activities.

This recipe for barbecue sauce comes from my cousin, James Tucker, of Lafayette, Alabama. He is one of the best outdoor chefs I've met, and here is his sauce for chicken.

### *Cousin James's Chicken BBQ Sauce*

#### Ingredients:

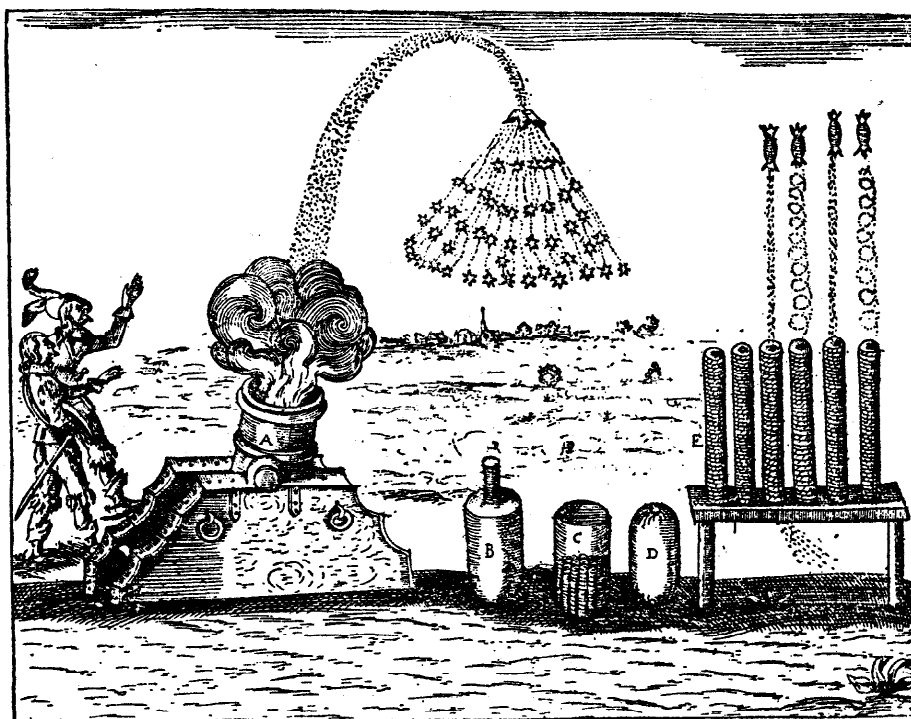
4 oz. vegetable oil  
8 oz. apple cider vinegar  
2 tablespoons poultry seasoning  
1 tablespoon black pepper  
1 tablespoon salt  
1/4 stick butter

#### Directions:

This must all be heated in a saucepan and brushed or mopped onto the chicken continuously during covered cooking over a medium charcoal fire. Cook for as long as the coals last. It will be all the more tender and flavorful the longer it is cooked, and it cannot be overcooked.

Give it a try on a relaxed summer evening, shoot some class C, and enjoy a taste of the deep South.

EDUARDO



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## For the Pyro Nut

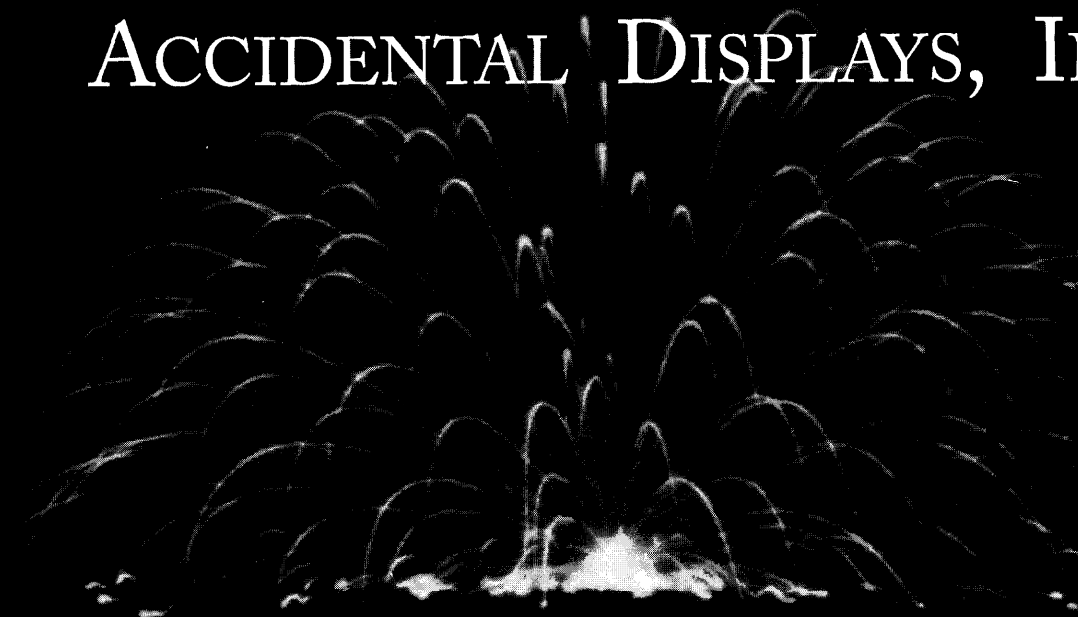
- Komplete line of Energetic chemicals
- Komplete line of paper products
- Komplete line of K-RAP shell Kanisters
- Komplete satisfaction guaranteed if you is not satisfied Kompletely.
- Komplete Koncealment of any Knowledge of your Kraft.
- Komplete Kounsel in the how-tos of Pyrotechnic Chicanery

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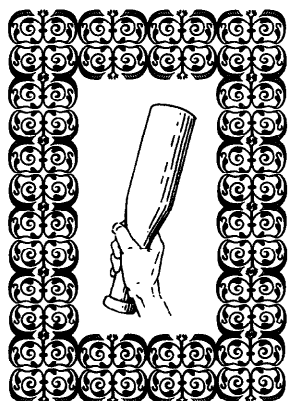
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The Society For the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny.



# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et prævalebit.” – I. *Esdras*, iij: 41.

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NO. 1

## AVANT-PROPOS

The staff of the *Case Former* had prepared a lengthy editorial for this space, garnished like an elaborate multi-break shell with flashes of wit, thunders of indignation, a parachute beacon of illuminating truth, and a final heavy report of amiable curmudgeonry, when we realized that we lacked a site to display it: column inches were at a premium, and paper is expensive. The editorial was to have dealt (again) with “political correctness” and those who have taken offense at words we have published in these pages. Our readers will probably be relieved to know the show has only been postponed and not cancelled.

With this issue of the *Case Former* we welcome our Chirurgion-General, Scoppietto Dulcamara, late of the celebrated medical faculty of Salerno, to our pages, with the first of what we hope to be a regular series of columns advising our Companions on questions of health care. Also, the “Sympathetic Detonations” feature has been expanded. Complaints continue to roll in about the high-handed conduct of Mr. B\*\*\*e B\*\*m (note the *Case Former's* new editorial policy of not printing offensive words). Re-elected, we are told, by a majority of only 21 votes, despite his egregious campaigning as early as the Western Winter Blast, Mr. B\*\*m now seems to act as if he rules by divine right. The reason we do not anoint politicians in this country, as they do the crowned heads of Europe, is that our leaders are slippery enough already. One of the Letters to the Editor is a real first, a communication from one who is not a Companion. This letter arrived here without a return address, but since it speaks with obvious inside knowledge and great discernment about one of the significant controversies now swirling, as such things are wont to do, in the P.G.I.I., we thought it might have much interest for our readership. ¶

PASQUINO DEI FUGISTI

## CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ.*

VIRGIL, *Aeneid* IV, xxij.

Rivers Country Day is a small prep school nestled in a spacious, private corner of Weston, Massachusetts. The campus spreads across richly wooded low hills that finally yield to Lake Nonesuch. It's a fine place for the semi-riche to send their brilliant brats prior to Harvard or Princeton, or alternately to get their troublesome rabble whipped into shape prior to parental breakdown. I'm afraid the first category eluded me. I was sent packing to Rivers to atone for my lowly B's and C's in public school, not to mention my constant misbehavior.

My first impressions of Rivers were those of the damned touring hell: jackets and ties, regulation haircuts, dawn to dusk study, endless homework, mandatory sports, and not a skirt to be seen. I must pick a major, I was told. What happened to Majorettes? This was a dark day indeed. I was inconsolable as I surveyed my predicament, plodding grimly along my tour, locked in a death struggle with my tie. After visiting the gymnasium I began plotting my escape. I was to play football and wrestle, I was told. Wonderful. At six feet and one hundred and forty pounds, I'd be a natural. What a gallant figure I'd cut playing football; a hatrack wearing a uniform and helmet.

Next was the science building, and there I found my purpose at Rivers. Visions of greenstick fractures and stretcher rides evaporated as I entered the chemistry lab. There my eyes beheld stainless steel and glassware, a spotless expanse of gadgetry surrounded by cabinet after glass-doored cabinet of dark brown bottles, solemn and quiescent. I walked down a row in reverent awe, my eyes sampling the names. Some of the chemicals I'd heard of, most of them I had not. But of this I was certain: they all spelled mischief. Ah, the room was redolent



with the sweet smell of trouble. Most of the cabinets weren't even locked. And those that were, why, with a bobby pin and length of tempered spring steel...

"Ahem, Mr. Tellerini," Mr. Prince said, breaking my trance, "would you like to join us at the administration building, or should we just leave you here?"

I reluctantly shuffled out, glancing over my shoulder. Well, so much for picking a major.

The Autumn of 1970 was a splendid one. Warm, dry air nurtured a sustained Indian summer, and the great oaks and maples rioted briefly in the blazing hues that New England is renowned for. I had adapted well enough to Rivers. I didn't like it, but I could survive it, and my grades surprised one and all. And I'd made friends. Scott Stoegel, a geeky, ebullient sort, and Jack Gosselin, a fellow exiled hoodlum, were my usual companions. We were all freshmen, and comparing notes helped us evade the constant hazing that all plebes must endure.

Chemistry was going surprisingly well too. I had finished the semester with an A-. Stranger still, I hadn't begun seriously to abuse the chem lab. Well, except for that time I stole some zinc, magnesium, and some sort of acid. I mixed them all up in a Dixie cup on the ping pong table in the basement. When nothing happened immediately, I got bored and forgot about it. When I remembered it several days later, I knew something evil had happened from the smell when I opened the basement door. Whatever it was, it burned up the Dixie cup and left an ugly pothole in the table. I figured I'd better learn some more before I tried that again.

Autumn retreated before a determined winter. To the chagrin of all, our White Christmas died prematurely at the whim of a warm seabreeze. So began our winter vacation. Jack, Scott, and I were detailed to stay after school to clean up the chem lab on that December afternoon, due to a disciplinary indiscretion. It was the first time we'd been left alone in the lab, and while we worked we explored and plotted, each of us hatching dreadful ideas. Stinkbombs, smokebombs, bomb-bombs, or super-duper-eat-anything-to-hell acid.

I had a dark idea, one that I hadn't planned to share with anyone. And I knew where all the stuff was. Oh yes, I'd peeked about and located the aqua fortis, the oil of vitriol, and the glycerin. And I knew the procedure all too well, thanks to the immortal text of Dr. Tenney L. Davis. If there's an afterlife, I have no doubt that Dr. D. is out there somewhere, in an obscure corner of eternity, roaming his little library and collecting newspaper clippings attributable to his teachings. He rocks back in his chair behind his desk, laughing thunderously at his erstwhile students blown to smithereens for forgetting a subtlety of procedure. His tattered scrapbook bulges with acetylene explosions and

dropped trays of azide. He leans back and bellows laughter...

I though I'd mention it just to see what they said. "Hey guys, as long as we're here, why don't we brew up a little nitro?" I asked lightly.

Stoegel tittered, thinking I was joking. Gosselin knew better and he regarded me carefully, his face first troubled, then pensive, finally growing a dark grin.

"Oh no. OH NO!" Stoegel cried, looking alternately at me, then Jack.

"Take it easy, Scott," I said soothingly, "Mostly I was just joking. But it really is pretty safe and simple," I reassured.

Professor Tellerini then launched into his lecture/sales pitch, voice calm and confident. I gave them the short form of the procedure; no point in alarming them with what could go wrong.

Jack was sold. Scott was aghast. "You guys are nuts! You'll blow the place to bits! Goddam meshuggener Goyim!" he shrieked, then lapsed into Yiddish.

Jack and I shrugged and gathered up the stuff. All we needed was a big beaker, a tray to cool it in, and a syringe to lift the nitroglycerin out with. We knew how to mix the acids to the amount of glycerin for complete nitration, and we measured it out. Jack was brooding over the Davis text, which I'd fetched from my locker.

"Hey Eddie, it says here the stuff gets pretty hot," Jack said skeptically. "And it'll explode if we don't cool it."

Scott was pacing about anxiously, muttering in Hebrew or choking, I couldn't tell which. Poor Scott was just too high-strung, and now he had a problem. There was no place else he could go. It was raining and cold outside, and the rest of the campus was locked and empty. It was just 1:30, and our ride didn't arrive until 4:00. Until then he was stuck with the nutty goyim.

"Hey Scott, shut up and make yourself useful." Jack said. "See if Bio is unlocked and grab a tray of dry ice." Stoegel came dutifully back a few minutes later studying a vaporous tray of dry ice. It seemed to calm him a bit.

We mixed the acid, the beaker in the tray of dry ice, and it did indeed get hot. We relaxed afterward, satisfied with ourselves for surviving thus far. Stoegel worried me. He was quiet, which wasn't like him and his blue eyes were huge, moonish orbs of terror behind those coke-bottle glasses. His mouth opened to form a perfect "O" so as to mimic his eyes as he gazed at the beaker, transfixed.

Next it was time to add the glycerin. "Scotty, Jack will watch the temp and ice, I'll stir, and you add the glycerin when I say, O.K.?" I said.

"Ah yeah, yeah, when you say," Stoegel stammered. I looked at him again, concerned. He wasn't tracking well.

His hand had begun to tremble, and he'd pushed his glasses off his nose twenty times in the last minute.

Jack nodded at me, and I began to stir, saying, "Now, Scott. Slowly."

Stoegel's eyes went wide, he picked up the glycerin, hesitated, and croaked, "N-N-N-Now?" It came out soprano.

"Yes, now!" I shot back. I shouldn't have yelled at him. He lurched up, and before we could stop him, Scott poured the entire 100 c.c. graduated cylinder of glycerin into the mixed acid.

Jack and I look up in horror. Our mouths had instantly gone dry. I felt lightheaded as I said, "Scott, it was supposed to be drop by drop." We all turned back to the beaker, which had now started to effervesce ominously, wearing identical expressions of hopeless doom – a timeless, gape-jawed gawk unchanged from the first neanderthal to fall off a cliff to the engineers at Chernobyl. Jack had begun to pile dry ice around the beaker furiously. It wasn't quite panic time, but close. The beaker and tray were enshrouded by a rolling cloud of CO<sub>2</sub> coming off the dry ice.

Jack approached the renegade reaction, fanning away fumes, and moaned, "It's too hot! It's thirty-five degrees!" We stood there, paralyzed with terror, watching the spewing, foaming cauldron.

"Scott, more ice!" Jack yelled.

Stoegel vanished, only to return a moment later, empty handed. "The door locked behind me when I closed it," he said, seemingly resigned.

We all knew each other's thoughts. "Trio killed in grisly lab explosion," the headline would read, and ol' Tenney Davis would cut it out for his scrapbook, shaking his head and chuckling merrily.

Well, maybe it wouldn't come to that. It was cold outside, and our only hope was to dump the damned thing in the swamp. I donned rubber gloves and picked the whole tray up whimpering and pleading for somebody to open the door for me. Jack did, Scott having again reverted to Yiddish, then run out to the courtyard, where he was hopping around frantically and railing in that peculiar, grating tongue.

The drizzle had turned to snow as I emerged from the lab, and I walked out into the big, fluffy flakes. I moved with convalescent care across the lawn towards the lake. The light breeze carried the vapor away long enough for me to get a look at the nitro. Red fumes had begun to issue forth, and the temperature was now thirty-nine degrees. The dry ice was almost gone and the red fumes meant the reaction was running amok. The liquid had stratified, and I saw with grim satisfaction that we had indeed succeeded in making nitroglycerin.

At the edge of the lake was Nonesuch Swamp,

and built over that was a rickety pier of sorts, more like a walkway, from which the biology guys collected their primordial ooze and tadpoles and amoebas. The many planks that had fallen off had been replaced with tree limbs, taped in place or tied there with shoelaces. I headed for the end of the pier looking like a psychotic Alfalfa, wild eyed and face so dreadfully pale and lunatic.

As I mounted the pier I saw a big, lazy snowflake sail remorselessly towards the beaker, which was pouring red fumes now. I closed my eyes and turned away, expecting to die when it hit. My heart pounded as I opened my eyes and took step after step, suffering each snowflake that tormented my trip.

I teetered my way across the Styx, and finally set the beaker, tray and thermometer down at pier's end, backing away in prayer. Oh Lord, givest me just a few steps from this thing and I promise I'll never maketh nitro again. As I turned toward Jack and Scott I broke into a trot. When I'd cleared the pier I tore into a screaming sprint that would have won any track meet Rivers could throw at me.

I stopped fifty yards away, hugging the flagpole. I was wringing wet and sick with adrenaline. I fell shakily to my knees and threw up, retching on empty. Perhaps I passed out briefly, I really don't recall. Jack and Scott helped me up, and Scott cracked a joke about my hairballs. Very funny, I thought, wiping the vomit from my chin.

We all stood in the snow watching the little pier, silently at first. After fifteen minutes the fumes had abated and we returned to the lab, already planning the cover-up.

Clearly, we couldn't just leave things as they were. What if someone came along and picked up the infernal beaker? I lived closest to Rivers, and this whole mess was my idea, so I was elected to come back and deal with it. After what I'd been through, approaching or moving the nitro was quite out of the question. I'd rather have had a game of Russian roulette. I'd bring my BB rifle back and shoot it, either setting it off or breaking it.

On the first day of vacation I donned winter gear and trudged the three miles to Rivers in the freshly fallen snow. The heavy blanket stuck to everything, and the countryside sparkled pristinely in the anemic winter sun. It was a fine day that I'll always remember. I was alive, you see, and I had no right to be. I wish I could generate that sort of gratitude without almost blowing myself up. But perhaps I'd stumbled onto something. Perhaps God intended that we maketh nitro each Sabbath, so that we could properly appreciate His works.

Rivers was deserted. Nobody had even plowed yet. I trudged to the pier, not knowing what to expect. It was still there, and on the end was a low pile of snow that covered the tray and beaker

of nitro. I loaded my BB gun and began plinking away at it. Periodically I'd hear a muffled "klink," but no explosion. After I'd run out of BBs I plodded home, nonplussed and cold. There was nothing else to be done.

It wasn't a merry Christmas. My mind toiled endlessly on that damned beaker, generating ghastly worst case scenarios. Two toddlers would find it, I was certain. Their scraps would decorate the swamp nicely. Oh, I could see it all in my mind. My appetite left me, then sleep, a tic finally visiting my left eye. I scurried to watch local news broadcasts and pored over each newspaper.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I found upon my return to Rivers in early January. I wanted to avoid approaching the swamp directly in favor of studying it from the windows, but my first glance in that direction dashed my plans. From one hundred feet it was obvious that there had been an explosion. Broken and splintered planks and pilings lay scattered about and jutted crazily from the snow. My heart leapt in my chest as I saw a dozen people gathered at the swamp, shrugging, scratching their heads, and stomping their feet for warmth. A wave of nausea washed over me as I approached, only to find Scott Stoegel, pale and obviously terrified, standing beside me. We exchanged conspiratorial glances and pressed forward to investigate.

What was left of the pier had collapsed and listed drunkenly to one side. The outer end had been shortened by fifteen feet, and the farthest extremity looked like it had been bitten off by some impossible leviathan arisen from the swamp. The snow-covered ice was littered with shattered pier parts. But thankfully there were no footprints in the snow leading to the pier's remains. No dismembered toddlers. Jack, Scott and I breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The mystery remained the subject of considerable speculation around campus. It was quite obviously an explosion, but its origin perplexed all but its perpetrators. And Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith, our chemistry teacher, had put it together. Although he never blew the whistle on us, Jack, Scott and I all noticed his coolness towards us, and the way he badgered us in class.

After a week or so of this, as Jack and I were leaving class, Mr. Smith blocked the doorway, casually leaning against it, fixing us with a crooked smile.

"So, what did you make it out of?" he asked benignly, his blue eyes merry above that twisted grin.

Jack and I glanced at each other, searching for a response.

"Make what out of?" I said, trying to look innocent. Mr. Smith just gazed at us, implacable and quiet.

I withered under it, battling against the grin spreading inexorably across my face. Jack nodded at me, and we told Mr. Smith the whole story. He blanched as we related it to him, shaking his head, moaning and sighing, obviously struggling for control.

"I oughta' have you idiots expelled for this," he said finally. He was mad, all right, but we could see him trying not to laugh. At long last he gave up, chuckled, and to our astonishment explained to us, point by point, what we'd done wrong. Mr. Smith was the coolest teacher I've ever known.

"If you clowns ever do anything like this again," he said, pausing for effect, "run it past me first. You'll live longer."

We discussed little projects of similar vein with Mr. Smith but never again tried anything more strenuous than nitrating cotton, which he helped us with. Twenty-five years have passed since that Christmas, and I've yet to make more nitroglycerin. Deranged as I am, that incident made a life-long impression. In troubled dreams I sometimes think I'm in a dorm room, with fuming red vapors all around, and I can't find the doorknob to run. And I hear the roaring laughter of Dr. Tenney L. Davis...

EDUARDO TELLERINI



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*"If God hadn't intended them to be sheared, he would not have made them sheep." — CHARLATAN WHEEZE*

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"Why Fireworks use Black Powder" by PROF. BLASIUS RAUCHMANTL, Ph.D.

"Cardboard - The Miracle Material" by PROF. TRADITORE DETESTABILE, Ph.D.

"RAP Shells Revisited" - a research report from KROOKSHANKEE SERVICES, INC.

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## SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

*News Notes From All Around*

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### The H.G.I. Puppet Theatre!

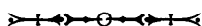
The management would like to announce the World Premiere of *The Kosanko*, a Musical Tragi-Comedy in four acts with lyrics by da Giro and music by Sir Arthur Sullivan. Performances will feature an intermezzo with Blombo lo Piombo and the Squirrel.

Alternating by weeks will be presented the recently re-discovered Grand Opera, *Blombo, re di Blefescu, tiranno ed usurpatore*. The Libretto, by Metastasio da Ponte da Giro, was discovered in old family archives by the Librettist's great grand-nephew, Paolo, along with music by Gioacchino Rossini. Revised and made ready for the stage by the younger da Giro, this is truly a Great Performance.

Coming in 1995: *I'm with the Pyros: A Groupie's Tale*. This sensitive rendition of our own Blombo lo Piombo's life story has been set for the theatre in a manner not seen since the demise of Puccini's collaborator Tosti. The leading librettist of the post-Tosti era, Paolo da Giro, apologizes for teaming up on this production with Andrew Lloyd Webber, but he needed the money.

Not until 1996, at least: *La liberazione meravigliosa; ossia, Blefescu dopo Blombo*.

— The P.G.I. Puppet Theatre —  
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## AURORA CONSURGENS, OR THE LAKE

For the better part of a year the author had been encouraged, admittedly not without a few hints on his part, to visit eastern Minnesota during the ides of July. The subject was discussed so casually that in our naïveté we thought we might simply drive out, spend a few quiet days and drive back, killing time by shopping at a few towns along the way. What a difference there is between idle daydreaming and receiving a formal invitation from Imbibo Bourbonini, originator and sponsor of the Lake Display! From the moment his envelope was opened the excitement began to build; thoughts of the event recurred weekly, then daily, then hourly, until there would have been no use in staying home if one had needed to. The invitation was "B.Y.O.B", so the author made it a point to save a few items which would otherwise have been consumed on the Fourth of July.

Heart medication was thoughtfully packed and workshop clothing was supplemented with worsted trousers and cotton shirts — after all, we weren't going to Iowa.

There was really no reason for the author to push his aging automobile nearly 800 miles the first day, but by this time side trips (even to gun shops!) were utterly forgotten. By lunchtime on the second day, the delicatessen clerk informed him that one of his destinations was right around the corner.

Almost by accident, then, the first odyssey was at the complex where the *Case Former* is printed! A dazzling array of complicated and costly machines, some of whose very names seem foreign to the outsider, clatters and churns in mysterious harmony to produce books, pamphlets and posters. (The only gadgets not in evidence were automated infinitive splitters and sentence fragmentators, which certain large publishers appear to have developed.) From the printing house it was only a brief journey through the countryside to the headquarters for our stay, where it quickly became apparent that this was no ordinary trip. The author has never been an enthusiastic traveller, partly because travel is expensive, but also because he is easily disappointed by grandly promoted tourist attractions. On the banks of the St. Croix the only problem was that it was not humanly possible to give all the attractions due attention. The library of the Institute would have demanded months by itself; even with a photocopier we soon gave up in favor of other pursuits. The manse is a repository of wonders too numerous to list here, but the shooting range and the main manufacturing building came to occupy most of the available time.

Some idea of the preparations being made can be gleaned from the fact that a twelve-inch, 47-pound cylinder shell, containing eighty crossettes

and a bucketful of barium chlorate stars, was assembled almost as an afterthought and finished at the last possible moment. Another, even more massive twelve and an eight-incher containing two breaks of "high tech" hummers had already been completed, while a drying table creaked and groaned under the weight of eight (yes, eight) eight-inch married comet shells. Not to be overlooked was the old favorite five-break crossette, the established tenure of which did not detract from its exotic nature. One or two of the best commercial firms, really rough and rugged competitors, might make such a shell on special order. At the Institute it is actually a stock item and is seen every year; each detail down to the finishing wrap holds inspiration for the man of science and beckons to the connoisseur of beauty.

The neighboring towns were pleasant enough, their shops and restaurants a cut above average; in fact one of the latter which Imbibo insisted we try was a true gourmet restaurant with a nationwide reputation. Even the women in the area looked a trifle cuddlier than usual, although modernity had worked its usual magic and none of them stood out as essential guests for the Lake. Comp. DaGiro offered to introduce a spirited redhead who had been featured in *Penthouse* magazine, apparently some sort of architectural journal, and although the author has never had much interest in career women, he was doing his best to keep an open mind. Paolo assured him she was neither a tomboy nor politically correct. The Director of the Institute, however, observed that it might be awkward adjusting to her big-city ways, that she might prove a distraction and even that the heart medicine might be required. He suggested in a firm but polite manner that the meeting be postponed.

July 16th, as press releases indicated, was a day of cosmic significance, when myriads of blazing comets filled the sky as if to foretell doom, and tremendous explosions shivered the hills. Apparently there was a similar happening on planet Jupiter, but for comfort and pleasantries the Lake was the place to be! As Eduardo said, such a display is better experienced than described or even photographed, since the subtle changes and the sheer size of the shell bursts cannot be done justice on film. We must mention however, for the sake of posterity, Eduardo's own spider volley, DaGiro's ground effects and practically everybody's multi-breaks. Herr Pfantodt's married comets (each shell different and with a contrasting center) burst with such marvelous symmetry that experienced fireworks people on the other side of the firing line were mistaking them for double-petalled chrysanthemums. "How did you put that report in a ball shell?", they would ask. The graceful curves and lacy frills of the crossettes appeared on cue, prompting admiring females to bestow hugs and kisses on the



*Effects of the Glonoïn Rocket*

man responsible. Imbibo's shells-of-shells (also a favorite project of this author) were of prodigious size and often featured four or five rings of inserts. Each ring opened in perfect unison – at least the ones which did not spread so wide that a hapless observer could not have vouched for all of them! Electrically fired material by Boomer Fireworks of nearby Zimmerschutz was also of fine quality; indeed even the Oriental imports were superb, having been carefully selected by the Committee. In short, the Lake Display and the whole trip to see it not only did not disappoint this sometimes finicky observer; it exceeded his expectations. Bad gasoline in one vehicle and a flat tire on the other were passing inconveniences, nothing more.

After the Lake there were still things to be done, including lunch at the University Club in the city, more shooting with all manner of weaponry, and a trip to the fireworks plant in Zimmerschutz, a surprisingly large operation. The same firm put on a public display, which we could hardly believe was production material; it contained zinc stars, shimmer-mag ball shells, and exploding cavity comets, and its bottom shots had the full four-ounce charge permitted by the N.F.P.A. (judging by the noise).

While searching out other I.O.O.J. members to view this display, we had to wander through an old run-down business district which was not very appealing at night. Fine brick buildings of the 1920s were now deserted and strange voices emanated from the dark alleys. Fortunately Officers Merwin and Hulbert of the St. George police force offered us an escort, assuring us we would come to no harm, and we soon located the other members at the river, already sipping Jack Daniel's.

Once again we must thank Dame Pfantodt for her hospitality, and Herr Pfantodt Senior for his psychological analysis of a Clinton voter in the newspaper. Likewise the Bourboninis, who have informed us that the Lake Display may be small or even nonexistent for a few years. Season's greetings to all, and keep your powder dry.

T. BABINGTON BRIMSTONE

## ...AND THE CONVENTION

It was suggested to me by one learned member that the *Case Former* might provide an appropriate source of solace and peace of mind after my recent experiences at the P.G.I.I. Convention. I trust the following reflections and retrospectives might find sympathy among the readership.

I was looking forward to an enjoyable week at the convention in the company of like-minded devotees of the pyrotechnic art and craft. The first indications that some aspect of convention planning might be flawed came in the form of a thirty mile drive between the hotel and convention site. Certainly this was somewhat longer than the "few blocks out of town" which is how the official travel agency had described the journey. Overlooking this minor impediment the journey was put down as a necessary inconvenience – surely it would all be worth it?

Following some minor confusions the convention site was finally chanced upon and stretched out before us was a splendid vista of some five hundred acres of rural Pennsylvania replete, it appeared, with a few thousand merry-making souls. Indeed, one could readily be forgiven for mistaking the convention for a carnival or jamboree, such was the party atmosphere. Amidst this intensity doubts started to form in my mind. Why, I thought, did I recognize so few name badges or faces, and curiously inconspicuous was conversation about shell construction or star formulation. From all appearances this was clearly not a gathering of fireworks scholars and practitioners. Further investigation revealed the principal focus of this *melée* to be the "Class C" vending area where a brisk business was taking place pandering to the eager demands of the fuse lighter majority. These gleeful souls sped off, frequently astride a golf cart, to display their sundry novelties under the attentive supervision of the second most dominant group at this gathering, the orange-vested safety committee members.

The opening display was found to be quite enjoyable although the crowd, or rather a significant proportion of its members proved to be a detraction. At a supposed international gathering of the firework *literati* I would have expected rather a more constructive criticism and appreciation of the various effects than the frenzied shouts and gasps that were heard about us. At this point the remarks in Lancaster about the reaction of the experienced worker to a display came to mind. This experience bore more resemblance to being among a regular display crowd and it was evident that we were in the company of *les ignorants*. From this moment on it was sadly obvious that the true pyrotechnists, the seasoned enthusiasts and the serious amateurs were vastly outnumbered by the le-

gions of fuse lighters and display spectators. Seeking out those truly dedicated to the art among this crowd of thousands was going to be a task demanding considerable fortitude. If one of the tenets of the Guild is the sharing of knowledge then why should those precious individuals with knowledge to share be drowned out by this ebb and flow of mediocrity?

One of the major attractions of the convention for me from the outset was the high level aerial competition to which I had been looking forward with some anticipation. Imagine my frustration when the scheduling of the "product demonstrations" was placed ahead of the competitions. This planning was in accord with the general commercialized theme of the convention and the need to appeal to the bulk of attendees with no acquaintance of practical pyrotechny. Curiously, many of this majority departed after the commercial shows – for singly fired competition shells, no matter how intricate, clearly held little attraction for them.

Some respite was found at the seminars presented by the more learned and experienced members of the Guild and on a few occasions it was evident that the material presented came as a bit of a shock for some puzzled audience members. One absolute gem overheard at one seminar on shell construction was "wow – does he really spend all that time making just one shell?" This followed a query from another audience member asking "what is pulverone?"

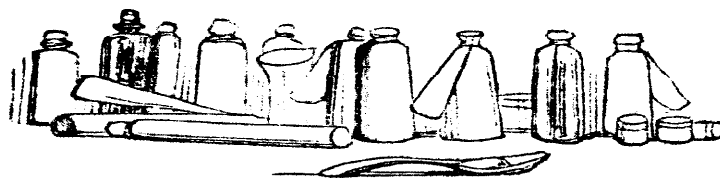
Thursday evening saw my first run-in with the safety fakers. Upon firing some shells at the class B line I was constantly accosted and bawled at in a most offensive manner by some crude imbecile of a man whom, from all appearances, was in a state of extreme mental torment as if suffering from shell shock trauma. Upon examining the labeling of one shell at a distance of around thirty feet from the unused mortar line I was greeted with one of the more memorable lines of safety fakery – "gentlemen, you cannot do that here, it is too dangerous." I could only come away wondering as to the criteria which the P.G.I. applies to the selection of such unfortunate individuals.

And so came the final evening and the promises of the record breaking superstring, the pyrotechnic birthday cake, whatever that might be, and the huge public display amidst a gallimaufry of other amusements. The P.G.I. advertising campaign had done its job and the public turned up in droves at \$20.00 a head as the convention plunged into ever deeper levels of hype and tastelessness. To my mind the public display failed to come remotely close to expectations and was certainly outdone by the much smaller Rozzi show on the previous evening. Overlooking the inevitable delays at the

(Continued on Page 10)



# Halinitropyromedica



## APOLOGIA

At first glance it seems peculiar, if not positively counterproductive, for the subject of "health care" to intrude upon the congenial and free-spirited atmosphere of fireworks. The toxicity of firework ingredients, often presented in a scaremongering fashion, is already a common theme in common pyrotechnic journals. Safety-fakers, bureaucrats and ambulance-chasers have laid long-standing siege to medicine, leaving few vestiges of the individualism and respect for tradition which once characterized that field. Perhaps as result, organized medicine has become directly hostile to pyrotechny. In the 1920s and '30s the AMA-sponsored health magazine *Hygeia*, which later became *Today's Health*, carried on a venomous crusade against firework sales; perhaps this inspired the left-leaning physicians who endorse gun laws as a "public health issue".

Why then include a medical column in *The Case Former*? The horrors described above are products of the twentieth century, and in our happier moments we classify the twentieth century as a self-limited disease. "The past is another country," and in that salubrious clime one encounters many curious connections between pyrotechnics and medicine, intellectual byways and sometimes mere overgrown trails which are instructive and amusing. Both subjects depend heavily on practical chemistry, so that for centuries a deep and abiding interest in one guaranteed at least a passing acquaintance with the other. Mankind's "inborn craving for medicine," as Osler termed it, has meant that substances as diverse as nitroglycerin and white phosphorus were seized upon for therapeutic use almost before their discoverers could wash the glassware. Even today all three ingredients of black powder may be found in some drugstores. In the days when pharmacists carried large inventories of chemicals it was not terribly unusual for them to mix colored fire compositions! The *Scientific American Cyclopaedia* of 1903 offered recipes taken from *Western Druggist* magazine while *Corner Druggist*, a collection of memoirs published in the 1940s, confirms that this was actually done. Today, of course, if an accidental ignition spread to the piles of insurance papers and welfare coupons, the resulting inferno would be so

enormous that nobody would escape alive.

Aside from its philosophical value, some of this forgotten lore has practical applications in our own turbulent age. Modern institutional medicine doesn't always have the best answer, even if one can afford to ask the question, and worse than its professional arrogance is the professional ignorance of the socialists' putative reforms. Should Federal health dictatorship actually come to pass, there will be some who refuse all contact with organized medicine, and who will need contingency plans. A few of our members have already increased their cultivation of botanical drugs, in the project aptly dubbed the Clinton Victory Garden, but not every ailment can be conquered with plant extracts. To be truly self-sufficient one must also study the classical mineral drugs, and even a smattering of synthetics. It is here that hobby pyrotechny assumes an expanded role, as a positive benefit to health.



Chlorate of potash was officially recognized in the *materia medica* by the early nineteenth century, and might well have been employed in the eighteenth. Apparently it was first administered under the erroneous notion that it would release oxygen in the blood, revitalizing the tissues of persons with poor circulation or wasting disease. Such efforts failed, for small quantities of chlorate are excreted unchanged in the saliva and urine, where the drug may have useful localized effects. Excessive serum concentrations attack hæmoglobin and destroy erythrocytes, so that paradoxically, persons poisoned by this powerful oxidizing agent may die from lack of oxygen. Kidney damage, induced by the millions of defunct and dying red cells, adds another dimension to an already unhappy ending. Fatal chlorate toxicity is rare and has occurred mainly in cattle, where sodium chlorate herbicides appeal to the unfortunate beasts' craving for salt.

The potassium salt may be given internally in doses ranging from three to twenty grains, or according to the earlier editions of the *Dispensatory*, as

much as thirty grains. Alas, the dosing interval is not specified, but because salts are rapidly excreted one may assume a regimen of three or four times daily, especially with the smaller doses. Practically speaking it is best to use the drug as a local application, where it apparently does liberate oxygen in contact with diseased tissue. This virtue is manifest in stomatitis and pharyngitis, vulgarly known as mouth ulcers and various types of sore throat. For such purposes it may be incorporated into troches or lozenges, or more expediently, employed as a gargle in 2% to 4% aqueous solution. Herr Pfantodt himself has testified to the value of this simple preparation, and shocking though it may sound, he does not even bother to procure the N.F. grade, but merely dips the chlorate from one of his hundred-pound drums. The compound may be characterized as a useful, though not essential, addition to one's medicine chest; since it is already a household item a trial is well worth the minimal effort and expenditure involved.

Because potassium chlorate was commonly stocked in pharmacies for more than a century, medical references carried warnings about its vigorous oxidizing properties; in fact the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia* still has its entry. Great care was doubtless needed in a setting where elixir of vitriol and hypophosphite salts were kept on the shelves, and where solid ingredients were routinely pounded and triturated in porcelain mortars. Chlorate throat lozenges naturally contained sugar, and sometimes tannic acid as well, and were not the sort of project to be entrusted to a green drugstore apprentice. Unfortunately some caveats were woefully imprecise, suggesting for example that mere contact with sulphur or clothing fibers could cause ignition, and failing to acknowledge critical differences between wet and dry mixtures. It is not improbable that chemistry courses tailored for medical personnel augmented chlorate mythology, that bane of our existence which has already been decried in *The Case Former*. The mysterious fascination of explosions extends to persons of all walks of life and levels of intelligence, so that half-truths about them bear charmed lives and may actually gather strength in the telling. The bold pronouncements of "experts" sometimes clear the air, but sometimes merely fix the ill-formed images already lurking the the collective psyche of the public. What garbled facts, what fantastic scenes and what vague shadowy fears may flicker through the dark corners of the mind, especially when the mind is already disturbed?

The famous British Order in Council, prohibiting any contact of chlorate with sulphur, was issued in 1894. It is perhaps only coincidence that in 1895 there was a clerk, aged twenty-five, whom family troubles has rendered desperate and who determined to seek death as a relief from his misery. Reviewing the various methods of committing

suicide he found nothing to his taste, and resolved on something new. Being familiar with the constituents of explosives, he resolved to convert his body into a bomb, load it with explosives, and thus blow himself to pieces. He procured some powdered sulphur and potassium chlorate, and placing each in a separate wafer he swallowed both with the aid of water. He then lay down on his bed, expecting that as soon as the two explosive materials came into contact he would burst like a bomb and his troubles would be over. Instead of the anticipated results the most violent colicky pains ensued, which finally became so great that he had to summon his neighbors, who took him to the hospital, where, after vigorous application with the stomach-pump, it was hoped that his life would be saved. ¶

SCOPPIETTO DULCAMARA, *I.O.O.J.*,  
*B.M., B.Ch., B. Pharm., P.G.I., etc.*

## Wogdon, Manton, & Mook, Ltd. GUN AND RIFLE-MAKERS



in view of the recent election

*Beg to inform their Customers that they are ready to fill orders of all sorts.*

 Small bores of the Rook class from .297 to .380 are especially well-suited for the night-flying *Escroqueria politica*, vars. *raisotaxa*, *regulatoria*, and *welfareensis*. These may also be shot with the Paradox gun; shot may sometimes do, but balls are occasionally necessary.

 Medium calibres are advisable against the man-eating feminazia, and may also be used for putting tired old jackasses out of their misery.

 Heavy rifles from .577 to 4-bore are necessary in taking on the hairy *Mammotha bureaucratic*. They are also useful in despatching rogue elephants that stray from the right-hand path.

U.S. AGENTS — A. BURR & CO.,  
WEEHAWKEN, N.J.



(...AND THE CONVENTION *continued from pg. 7*)

beginning I would like to ask which genius was responsible for spreading the show out for such a long period and frankly I could not believe my ears when an intermission was announced. Surely, the most basic rule of displaying fireworks in a presentation of any size is to maintain continuity and ensure interest. This was hopelessly protracted and I have witnessed far more impressive shows on a much smaller scale and budget.

Dear reader, you have probably gathered that the New Castle convention was not a pyrotechnic event for which I shall hold the fondest of memories. Certainly it was too large, remote, and ambitious. More controversially for some, it was too commercialized and ludicrously populist in approach, the P.G.I. has opted to attract the lowest common denominator element, the fuse lighters, the ground bombers and the "mega bucks" display spectators whilst relegating the serious amateur enthusiasts to their own forgotten niche. In many respects this event owed more to pantomime and showmanship than pyrotechnic endeavor. More seasoned members tell me that it used not to be this way before the Guild took the populist and sensationalist trail it would now appear to have departed upon. To my mind the result was a vast market place for money making and a parade ground opportunity for a certain type of authority-seeking individual taking on the safety faker mantle. What hope is there for a scholarly and serious convention for the real enthusiasts and not this mass of lurid pleasure seekers? The Guild would never be where it is now without its great pyrotechnic craftsmen and innovators – let them not be forgotten. ¶

TRUENOS DE BERTHOLLET

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## PAUL VERONNE RIDES AGAIN

One of my pet peeves in life is the person we refer to as a safety-faker. Although there are a few good orange-vested people and some decent security people, the ones I'm describing are a menace to us all in ways that set them apart from the rest. Why can't the PGI have these people fill out applications like the rest of us who want a job, and then select the most qualified for that job? Instead, the more inexperienced people get to order the more knowledgeable people around. The same can be said about the public display inspection team. I'm all for having people around to help, but I draw the line when they get in the way of my job. Bianco told me a better name for the P.D.I.T. They should be called the public display *assistance* team. If we need more lumber or wire or so forth, they should be the ones to help locate and deliver it, rather than giving us approval on how to shoot our

own display. As for the rest of the volunteers who do a good job, keep up the good work and we'll see you at the I.O.O.J. parties.

I've also received numerous requests to do more top ten lists, so here's another one:

## TOP TEN REASONS TO THROW PEOPLE OUT OF THE P.G.I.

10. Too many clowns in the Guild
9. Nothing better to do when we run out of fireworks and beer.
8. A pair of "boobs" of another sort will be more enjoyable.
7. We can have our own golf cart instead of stealing theirs.
6. No more Mickey Mouse mortars.
5. Frauds of the P.G.I., not welcome.
4. It's time we deploy the expert expulsion committee.
3. Talking and writing about these people wastes too much of our time.
2. We would be doing the D.E.A. a big favor.
1. Because we can! Read it! It's in the bylaws!

Good day (?) ¶

PAUL VERONNE

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## DYNAMITE, FLOODS, AND SWEDES

*Water water everywhere, and all the boards did shrink.  
Water water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.*

COLERIDGE, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Spring, when a young man's fancy turns to love, and nature's fancy turns to flood. So in 1965, water everywhere; none fit to drink.

It was during this time I decided to visit my friend Geno. Geno lived right on the edge of the river in a picturesque dump of a town that was bordered by the river, railroad tracks, Pig's Eye Lake, and an oil refinery. Geno's house was an old garage built in 1912; a large room with crude running water, and a pit privy where the pit was a removable 55 gallon drum. In the corner of the privy there was a pail of lime with a scoop, used to keep the odor down, and an old hip boot with

a sign that said "USE THIS IF THE PILE GETS TOO HIGH."

When I arrived at Geno's he met me at the door with a cup of coffee, one of those big heavy white diner type cups; necessary because we were drinking "Southern Plantation Dark Roast" coffee. For those of you not familiar with this, it's what is done with burned coffee beans, mixed with chicory and ground, producing a mixture where two bad flavors combine into one that is basically worse, but tolerable. According to Geno, in the south, it's known as Coon Ass Coffee, (no offense intended to any reader of the Negro race, but it must be remembered that in 1965, *politically correct* was still a term associated with Stalinist Russia, and was considered un-American).

Geno decided we should sit by the edge of the water and watch the flood. His old barn, or rather carriage house, complete with hayloft, was surrounded by the rising waters. He wanted to tear this building down. But now with the flood waters surrounding it, burning made more sense.

Now I am not going to bore you with the details of offering the city a chance to use the barn for fire training (I always felt they hoped Geno's house would catch fire and burn to the ground during this exercise), nor with the fact that Geno and I hung old tires in the rafters of the barn along with plastic bottles full of kerosene, plus all the combustibles we could find. No, this story is about dynamite, yes *dynamite*. It will be sufficient to say the fire was spectacular, billowing clouds of black smoke only rivaled by the bonfire at the I.O.O.J. party at Fargo - but on to the next day and the dynamite.

The smoke had cleared, the embers long dead. The only remains were the smells of a fire, some charred flotsam gently bobbing in the murky flood waters in cadence with the ripples of current, and a small part of the barn itself, or rather an addition used to store firewood in the past.

The little shed stood in defiance to the forces of Vulcan and the previous eve's inferno; Geno, mumbling to himself, seemed to be thinking "well, if this Swede can't fix your wagon, maybe one named Alfred Nobel can," and he turned to me and said "Do you know how to fuse and cap dynamite?" Geno explained we could put some on the foundations of the old shed, which were under water, and the explosion would destroy the foundations, letting the shed be carried away by the flood waters. Now at the time this made sense and if it didn't, it sounded like fun.

We took off in Geno's Cadillac Miller hearse and in a while we were at a rural hardware store stocked with everything you could want, including dynamite. We explained to the clerk we wanted to blast out a stump. We were led down a flight of long old stairs; then down a cluttered aisle to a shelf deep in the bowels of the store where the wood-

en box marked DuPont was stored. The clerk with a casual flick of his hand opened a small bag and asked "How many?"

Now in present times when a person has to sign his life away and get permission from every bureaucrat in creation to buy, possess, transport or use explosives for any reason, I fondly recall that *how many*. "Oh, six will do." I said. "Better have some caps and fuse," said the clerk as he dropped the small bright tubes into another bag with the fuse, "keep these from the dynamite until you fuse it up, safer that way." We retraced our way out of the cellar to the front counter and paid. Soon we were on our way back to Geno's.

Now Geno was that kind of guy who could change; and during the trip back to his house he changed into an explosives expert. When we walked to the shed at the edge of the water he asked "What shall we do?" I suggested we attach at least a half stick to two separate poles to enable us to place them in close proximity to the foundation under the water, where because of the water's incompressibility, the explosion would work against the old concrete and shatter it.

This logic failed to impress Geno; so with a shrug of his shoulders he walked over to his scrap pile and returned with a large iron nut and some wire; "cut off about a third of that stick and fuse it" he said; I did so and he proceeded to wire the dynamite to the nut; then he lit the fuse and threw it into the space between the roof of the shed and the water's edge. "RUN" Geno cried as he found his legs; I slowly walked back about thirty feet and laid down on the grass knowing the six feet of Bickford Geno insisted we use had a little time to burn yet and running wasn't called for.

After a minute or so there was a little thump, a smallish shock felt through the ground, a burst of smoky bubbles breaking out of the murky water, and the shed only wiggled. Geno, his courage fortified by the fact the shed still stood and that his friend was still alive, returned to the shoot site. A discussion followed as I tried to explain how we only compressed water; how the explosive must be as close as possible to the concrete to be of any good effect, and his pet cats would like the carp now floating by the shed. "Well fuse up the rest of the stick and that will take care of it" Geno said; and he proceeded to make the same mistake again, thump, wiggle, bubble, but this time we got some splash. Geno, now angered, exclaimed "Fuse up a whole stick this time" (expletives deleted to avoid offending the faint of heart). When I handed him the stick, he wired it to another and wired both to a piece of scrap bar, lit the six foot fuse and threw it. It landed in the center of the roof - where else?

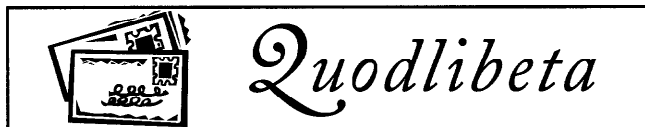
Now it was Milano's turn to cry out, "RUN!" We took off in the direction of Geno's house. It seemed the best thing to do at the time, actually;

leaving town was in order, and if stopped by the police we'd better deny everything and see if they had proof or witnesses.

There is no stranger feeling than waiting for an explosion you don't want to happen. There is a certain apprehension, like being alone in a bank at night. After looking out the window at least ten times and seeing the smoke from the fuse rise in the dead still air, I sat down, convinced a jail sentence awaited me.

At last the "crump" of an explosion; the windows shook, but remained unshattered. I said to Geno, "Let's go outside, play dumb, and see what happens." After what we had just done, playing the part of a fool would come naturally. What happened was that Geno's neighbor, who lived over about three vacant lots, came peeling out of his driveway, his car scattering gravel from smoking tires. About five minutes later came the faint sound of a siren; in another minute or so the squad car skidded to a dusty stop on Geno's gravel driveway. The officer leapt from the car; and over the sound of the wailing siren pointed to Geno and screamed, "If you ever fire that muzzle loading cannon of yours, except on the Fourth of July, the mayor says you're in jail for a week - got it?" He spun on his heels, got back in the car, and as Geno started loudly to protest his innocence, I began to drag Geno toward the house. When indoors, Geno was still protesting. "We could have proved we didn't fire the cannon" he screamed. "Geno, we got off lucky, drop it," I told him. I have heard it said in the Northwest, "NEVER trust a Finlander with dynamite." I can say with some certainty this applies to at least one Swede I know. By the way - no shed. ¶

MILANO GIANSLAVI



Dear Friends,

You do not know me, nor will most of you ever really get to know me. For that, I am saddened. You may never hear from me again. However, I have been watching something very loathsome develop within the P.G.I.

Just as the Democratic Congress thought they finally had gotten their rubber stamp for their socialist agenda, when Bill and Hillary were elected, so has a certain group when the Guild got your Mr. and Mrs. President. "Slick" is the operative term here for both pairs. Smooth, friendly and very, very slick.

The recent petition to eject certain members has exposed Mr. B\*\*m's true colors. The worst of these

is violating the sanctity of his word and the trust his fellows put in that word and confidence. A man who can not be trusted at his word, or who violates the trust of his high office and his confidants, should be branded with a scarlet letter.

The officers, without doubt, have been put through a most disheartening and sleepless torment because of the petition. However, four of the six have *tried* to maintain a position of neutrality and fairness, regardless of their personal feelings. Putting the decision into the hands of the membership was smart and fair. Let those that have benefited or been hurt decide. The good of the many outweighs the good of the few. You decide when you have had enough.

Your President has used his office actively to try to affect the outcome of the petition, feeding bits and pieces of confidential actions and conversations to those who would print them, regardless of the intent of those confidential airings. He has used the Guild attorney as a lackey by feeding him partial and twisted information. The attorney then unethically breached client confidence by sending out a letter to selected members.

Why all the political positioning? To discredit those that have stood up to these people, to gain power, and to have continued access to, guess what, the Guild treasury. As in real politics, to find answers, *you follow the money*. While I will not pass judgment here on what our resident experts have done, I will examine this.

How do you become a credible expert in any field? Either through experience and grand success in the business of that field, or through research and experiment. Lacking success, you do the other. Research takes money. How do you get it? From other people. How do you convince them to give it to you? Convince them you are an expert. How do you do that? See step one! Just as with Congress, it helps to have one of your people at the top, so when it looks like you might be in trouble, he can whip up sympathy for you. Everyone will, someday, be accountable for his actions. You choose the path you will walk and you will be judged by your actions.

You saw some of these people's finest work last year when they went after the publisher of the Bulletin, sending out PMS (poor me syndrome) letters to whip up support and grilling him at the election. Why? The publisher wouldn't bow to their demands. In academic circles, it is known as publish or perish. What do you publish? Your research. See step one. Having failed in replacing the publisher, your co-Presidents have gone after a second officer and it will continue until they have secured controlling votes on the PGI board. Why? See step one.

What you must now do is be sure that the management of the Guild remains in the hands of pyros. Without fail and above all else, you must do this! Let the "experts" and academicians remain if

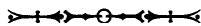
you choose, but keep the management of the Guild in the hands of real pyros. The Guild will grow in membership and political influence; that is its destiny, but let it be slow, deliberate, and without small time political games at the top. Keep the Guild in the hands of the people who will die beside you on the firing line, not discuss your demise at tea.

When you hear, "after all, they have worked so hard and done so much for the Guild," you reply "so have a lot of people, but the issue is what they have done lately?" All that research and hard work was bought and very well paid by grants from the Guild. Anyone could have done it.

When you hear this well worn out crap about "Van wouldn't have wanted it this way," you reply: "Correct, Van founded the Guild for pyros, not those who would ride on their backs for position and status." To the rumor mongers and bomb throwers that say "Who will be next?" just respond: "keep your nose clean and you don't have to worry about it!"

Heed the warning! Keep real pyros at the helm, not self-inflating gilded sheep skins.

The right buxom, and honorable,  
MISS KAY RAND



Dear Mr. Tellerini:

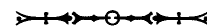
For some time now I've been meaning to drop you a line. I wanted to let you know that I purchased a copy of your "Best of the Case Former" while at the PGI convention, and I have seldom laughed so hard in my entire life. The article, "On the Forced Drying of Pyrotechnic Devices," was a classic (to abuse an already much-abused term). Your "Improved Archery Projectiles," may very well revolutionize bow-hunting, putting archery on a par with the noble game of horse-shoes (close being quite possibly good enough). "The Young Pyros vs. John Law" ought to be required reading in every high school civics class. "Chlorates and Sulphur" (and/or sulphides) are of course necessary for that finest of backyard pyrotechnics, the *globe torpedo*, and countless other sources of gratification. As my old friend Mike K. is wont to say, "Real men don't use perchlorates."

Also, before I forget, I want you to know that my late and very dear friend Brian Kelley was an enthusiastic fan of *The Case Former*, and that he promoted it within our circle of friends at every appropriate opportunity. I think it can surely be said that your publication gave him a great deal of humorous relief during his last, difficult days. When I travelled to Michigan to help with his funerary arrangements, his collection of *The Case Former*, obviously much-read, provided some comic punctuation in an otherwise wretched and stressful time.

In any case, put me down as giving a hearty "thumbs up" to your endeavor. Sorry to miss you at the convention – you were conspicuous in your apparent absence. Please do keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

A.J. SMITH



ED. NOTE: *In yet another first, the Case Former has received an original poem. This, too, appears to be a reference to our stellar P.G.I. co-presidents. We are mystified by its source, but not surprised at the outpouring of sentiment.*

### The Buttheads are Blooming

The buttheads are blooming  
around the site,  
on their golf-carts with their noses  
as high as a kite.

They feel that they are the king  
and queen of the convention,  
but they don't care. The schedule was a mess,  
and the boss was a riot.

If you ever need a ride,  
don't look in their eyes,  
because all you'd get  
was a pair of "good-byes,"  
as off they rode without you.

And if you need to have something done,  
and the right chairman isn't there,  
just call on the buttheads –  
they'll give you a scare.

They will smile at some,  
and give a snub to others,  
Boy, wouldn't you like  
to be their brothers.

So, you had to vote, and so you did,  
It was a shame the polls closed down early,  
For if not, you know Jim  
would have won in a hurry.

So as we stand by  
for the next two years,  
Better close your mouth  
and open your ears;

For they're out there,  
manipulating as we said.  
The Buttheads are blooming –  
let's put them to bed!

SKINNY MINNIE & BEANIE WEENIE

# COW-BIRD HATCHLINGS IN THE PYROTECHNIC NEST



*or, the dirty bird gets the worm.*

*We were forwarded a letter, received by a noted P.G.I. member from a gentleman of the press, that went into some details of Mr. B\*\*m's performance at the New Castle convention, which may explain the sort of reaction he provokes in many people. We join the letter in mid-stream...*

...This is the first year we have attended a convention and we learned a great deal. We met a lot of nice people that were a lot of help to us with all of our questions, as well as the most incredible fireworks shows we have ever seen.

The only problem that we did encounter was after taking a shell building workshop. We were asked to go to the "B" firing line to fire the shell we had just built. While going to the "B" line, B\*\*\*e B\*\*m had stopped us and was questioning the validity of our press passes (which were supplied by the PGI). Next he asked us for some additional identification and also questioned the validity of our drivers' licenses. He even alluded to the fact that they may be some kind of fake and that some people have two or three drivers' licenses. I had also supplied him with my PGI membership card. B\*\*\*e then asked who had issued the press passes to us and we told him Rob Silverman had. He then proceeded to call Rob on the radio to check out our story. I understand that he needed to be very careful with security and to make sure we were on the up and up. Also, he needed to make sure we had signed the insurance waiver. The problem I had with B\*\*\*e is the way we were treated. He treated us like we were some kind of criminals or counterfeiters or something. Even after Rob and Lori had corroborated our story, there was no apology, just throwing his arms up in the air and say-

ing "I'm done with this" and walking away. He also had some concerns about the purchases we had made in the class "C" tent. I was under the impression that being PGI members, we had the right to purchase items from the class "C" tent. If this is not the case, let me know.

If I was not in the fireworks business and had a love for fireworks and the PGI, I would have taken out my frustration with my pen via the newspaper. After talking with other media people that came to the convention, they felt that they were also not welcome. One camera crew was even kicked out of the "C" line while taking some footage. I don't know if you were aware of it, but the press was even kept out of the grandstands on Thursday and Friday nights. Like it or not, we need the press on our side. The Press reaches the people and the people do the voting for the lawmakers. If we don't have the people behind us soon the lawmakers will outlaw fireworks and we all will be out of business. As a fireworks organization we must be more attentive to the press if we are ever going to get any help from them. They may not deserve it but we can't treat them this way... it's like the old saying, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

With the exception of these few problems we had a good time. I hope you will give some thought to my advice...

*Our response to the advice that Mr. W., who wrote this letter, so generously gave, is simple. Eliminate the source of the problem by removing him from authority. The procedures are available - see Article IV, Section 7(c), and also Article VI, Section 8 of the P.G.I.I. by-laws!*

## IMPEACH THE B\*\*M

Faithful readers, I bring you not tidings of joy but wails of sadness. For I, your humble scribe, will no longer be reviewing the P.G.I. conventions. This is my final farewell, my swan song. Why, you ask? Is Paolo no longer entranced by fireworks? Have the forces of political correctness finally won? Will I not continue to point out that the emperor has no clothes?

The answer is simple and complex, like a Democratic Party tax increase. Simple – they raise taxes. Complex – what the hell do they do with the money?

Well, I sojourned to the great money-waster in the East. I have nothing but praise for our hosts, Rob and Lori. They concentrated on making the convention run smoothly and keeping everyone well-fed (I was overjoyed with this!). But the character of the Guild has changed. We are no longer just fireworks men. We have groupies, dilettantes, snobs, Barney Fife clones, and assorted morons, all presided over by the head groupie, the Great Squirrel Killer himself. We are no longer together just to enjoy fireworks – we are on an “outing” to be seen. Excuse me while I go be nauseous.

First, let me thank Rob & Co. for the job they did to make me feel at home. I really enjoyed the time I spent with you. Second, let me apologize to Bill Bahr and his Safety Committee. Though I have opined in the past that this was a group that should have been gently but firmly shot at sunrise, now I must say that, *sans* a bad apple or two, they have, like fine Burgundy, mellowed with age. They were the voice of reason that restrained the green-hatted Barney Fife clones and the golf-carting clowns of the Public Display Inspection Team.

What was great about the convention was: the Rozzi display, Don Rowe’s lecture, the thirty-six inch shell, a few shells in the public display, the Comet product demo, and a few good people. Also, how good it was to have FOOD!

The rest of the convention was long and boring. Skies filled with cheap Chinese crap – I was so sick of red, green, and white. Please get a new color of shell. No, get some new fireworks – no, get a new leader.

The true fireworks people came, as always, for a good time and great fireworks. The Head Groupie was present to make sure we were strip-searched if we tried to go to class “B” shooting, to bloviate at the business meeting (only his agenda was played), to offend the Press and the members, and to drive around in his golf-cart dispersing his particularly foul ordure upon the people. Why do we continue to elect this pompous, overbearing lout who addresses us with hollow, patronizing drivel and spends our funds like a drunken sailor on a spree?

How much money *did* we lose? Wild rumors have been floating about in the absence of hard

information, abetted by the protracted delay of the usual financial reports. We have heard that expense ran as much as \$100,000.00 over budget. Due to increased attendance, revenues reportedly ran high too, but we have heard bottom-line claims ranging from a \$40,000.00 net deficit to slightly in-the-black. We have heard on one hand that unwarranted bills have been presented to the Guild, on the other that honest folk who rendered service to the Guild have been stiffed. What’s the story?

We do want to emphasize that *none of this*, apparently, is the fault of our convention host. For his part he handled only a small amount of Guild funds and did not, as some previous convention hosts have done, set up any elaborate shell corporations to funnel revenues into his pocket when they should have gone to the P.G.I. We *have* heard that our President, acting without consultation with other Board members, unilaterally obligated the Guild in several situations. *His adherence to his fiduciary duty deserves searching scrutiny.*

What shall be done? Shall we have a telethon to replenish the Guild? Throw the B\*\*m out. If I did his act, I’d quit. He has run roughshod over the by-laws, bent parliamentary procedure, and become drunk with power. So, G.S.K., why not retire. Please, don’t spend any more of our money, we can’t afford it. Alms for the P.G.I.!

But Paolo, why no more articles about the conventions? Because I was told by a mouldy green-headed clone, who couldn’t get out of the road, that I don’t know anything about fireworks.

Oh, well, I guess I could take up molesting squirrels.

PAOLO DA GIRO

### To His High-Mightiness

HERR PROFESSOR DOKTOR B\*\*\*E B\*\*M

this space is obsequiously dedicated.

To his Exalted Position he has brought  
the Qualities of many Celebrated Leaders:

The *Humility* of *Louis Quatorze*,

The *Even-handedness* of *Judge Jeffreys*,

The *Transparent Candour* of *Macchiavelli*,

The *Vision* of *Helen Keller*,

The *Fidelity* of *Arnold*, all surmounted by

That *kindly consideration of differing  
opinion* characteristic of the late *Joe Stalin*.

Affectionately, by his devoted Servitor,  
PASQUINO



# Now Playing THE KOSANKO

*featuring*

## BLOMBO LO PIOMBO AND THE SQUIRREL

### THE PATTER-SONG OF BLOMBO LO PIOMBO

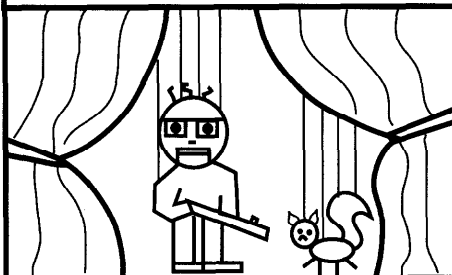
- Bl.* I am the president of the Guild,  
*Chor.* And a great squirrel-killer is he.  
 Be is very, very good, and be it understood,  
 He's never made a firework,  
*Bl.* I've never made a firework,  
*Chor.* He's just a fireworks groupie.  
*Bl.* I am the president of the Guild,  
 Completely independent – that's me!  
 In a free hotel-room do I hang my pants,  
 (and so do my sisters and my cousins and my aunts)  
*Chor.* And so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts.  
 Oh! so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts.  
*Bl.* I am the president of the Guild,  
*Chor.* And a great squirrel-killer is he.  
 Be is very, very good, and be it understood,  
 He's never made a firework.  
*Bl.* I've never made a firework,  
*Chor.* What, never? *Bl.* No, never! *Chor.* What, never?  
*Bl.* Well, hardly ever –  
 I just fool around with class "C".  
*Chor.* He just fools around with class "C",  
 He's just a fireworks groupie,  
 (who squanders all your dues money)  
 Oh! just a fireworks groupie!



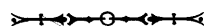
This is more fun than selling  
magazine subscriptions, Ken!

And it's easier than  
expert witnessing,  
too, Charley!

H.G.I. Puppet Theatre



Join in, boys and girls, while  
we sing The Patter-Song of  
Blombo Lo Piombo.



(sung to the tune of "I am the Captain of  
the Pinafore" by Sir A. Sullivan)

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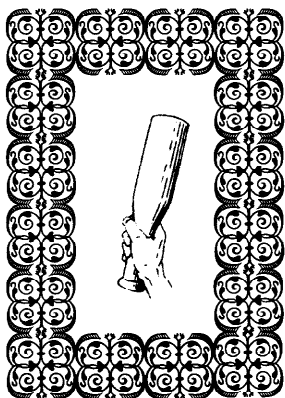
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The Society For the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny.





# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et praevallebit.” – I. *Esfdras*, iij: 4I.

VOL. III

FEBRUARY, 1996

NO. 2

## ALLOCUATION OF THE RT. VEN. EDUARDO TELLERINI, G.:C.:

My dear friends and companions, it has been a pleasure to oversee a number of events in the world of fireworks during my watch at the helm of the I.O.O.J. Old friendships have been renewed, new ones born, and understanding reached where conflict had before prevailed.

This is not to say we've planted any flowers in our asses. We've helped to slay our share of dragons, and although we seem to be running out of them, we're prepared to put to the sword any more that arise. Expert nit-witnesses beware; the shadow above just may be a case-former, the glint in the night a pair of scissors. And if you smell something foul and curdled, it'll be too late to run.

We've had a lot of laughs and had our share of fun. So it was meant to be: and so it will continue. To that end we are honored to include in our editorial staff and the *Case Former* an eminent practitioner who will be known as Pulsar, making his editorial debut in this issue. In addition we bring you a host of contributions by our veteran staff. Reports of musical tragi-comedy playing at the P.G.I. Puppet Theatre have inspired several talented lyricists to submit their work for the pyro-musical stage. We have all heard of fireworks shot to music, fireworks shot *with* music (an important distinction), and “show choreography” – these may be the subject of serious discussion (yes, even in the *Case Former*), but that's for another time. Where but the *Case Former* could you find music *about* fireworks, pyrotechnists, and the things and people that bedevil their existence? Yet another first!

Our Grand Manifestation, which followed the P.G.I. convention, was held in Plover, Wisconsin. I was curious about calling a town “Plover.” They said it was some sort of waterfowl. Sounded fishy. I turned the matter over to the I.O.O.J. Historial Research Division. We learned that the “fo(u)l” part was indeed correct.

As those who were present at the P.G.I. convention know, there are rather ancient railroad tracks

running through the town. Digging through the records at the local historical society, we found that in 1880, President Rutherford B. Hayes, *en route* to his famous tour of the American West, passed through the region. Now, as was then, there's no reason to stop in such a place, other than to blow it off the face of the map, as was our purpose. Nonetheless, President Hayes ordered his train stopped there. Apparently seized with severe gastrointestinal distress, and seeing a local rail spur, he relayed instructions to the engineer to *Pull-over!* The brakeman heard it as “Plover” and as such it was logged on the map of the Milwaukee Road. It has been thus named ever since.

It has been my honor formally to transfer the reins of our Order into the capable hands of the Right Venerable Giustiziare Fiammante, one of the most senior and accomplished amongst our Companions. The man throws a party with the best of them. We have accomplished much, dear friends. We have grown about as large as we should get, it seems, without risking the overgrowth that plagues larger organizations.

So take heart and share with me the celebration of the Installation of Rt. Ven. Comp. Fiammante as our new presiding officer; and of Vens. Comps. Moschetteria and Dulcamara as his able seconds. Special thanks to the folks who worked so hard and contributed to our party, which was its usual blowout, and to the many that helped the I.O.O.J. with their suggestions and writings for the *Case Former*. I'd love to name you all, but we don't work that way. ¶

EDUARDO TELLERINI

## THE CLOCK

*Tempus edax rerum.*

OVID, *Metamorphoses* XV, ccxxxiv.

*Fugit irreparabile tempus.*

VIRGIL, *Georgica* III, cclxxxiv.

Like most pyros, my relationship with fireworks was not arranged. No one forced me down this aisle with a shotgun. Rather, my fascination with fire was

imposed from within, by a force no less natural than instinct.

I've been working with fireworks for over 30 years. Along the way I've done some remarkably foolhardy things and I will recount one of them. I pick this tale from a portfolio of hundreds; some of them spectacular, some of them unfortunate, but all of them more interesting for the inclusion of fireworks as the central theme.



After pulling straight "D's" in ninth grade at public school, my parents decided that the prep school experience was what I needed. Naturally, I disagreed, but after a three-week "run-away-from-home" (spent drinking beer and playing pool in my friend's basement), I acquiesced, and soon found myself in a dormitory full of pencil neck geeks. Actually they weren't all geeks. It was an odd collection of third rate preppies, serious dope-smokers and would-be athletes.

I arrived with a large suitcase full of my pyro supplies. It was an impressive travel kit with plenty of perc and real German dark. I had tools, the old Westech literature, and plenty of tubes begging to be brought to life.

We all lived on the third (top) floor of the main building of the school. It was known as the "flight deck" for the reason that there were always large fans running in the windows of the rooms. These were employed year-round to ventilate the pot smoke.

The highlight of each week was the three-hour period given us each Saturday night to socialize. Guys and girls would all go to a vending machine area that overlooked the football field. Here we would smoke cigarettes and shoot the shit about who was "boffing" whom and where the next party was to be held. This was to be one of my first venues for a public display.

It wasn't long before I constructed a simple aerial salute to be presented on Saturday night. We would walk down to a remote corner of the football field and set the device, to be ignited with a cigarette delay. Then we would casually walk back to the vending area and snicker in anticipation of the show. The mortar would go off and loft a pretty heavy salute skyward. BOOM! For a split second the field was illuminated and one could see dozens of students engaged in a variety of illicit activities. This would always crack us up and it soon became obvious who was creating the displays.

Soon after, I was visited by the R.A. (resident advisor) of the flight deck. I happily showed him my portable lab and asked if I could make him something. Well, he wasn't as big a prick as he could

have been but he advised me to take my explosives home. That I did and the Saturday night shows were canceled. But the finale was yet to come.

I won't go into it here, but later that year I came to possess the keys to just about every building at the school. Most treasured among these was the one to the chemistry lab. Here I had at my disposal all nature of chemicals – analytical grade no less! Being young, my interests centered around flash powders and I whipped up an ungodly brew. Potassium chlorate, sulphur, magnesium powder and anything else that would burn was utilized. At the end of the night I had a pretty serious ground bomb. It would prove to have the power of a stout 3" salute. The next weeks were spent coming up with a use for the device.

I should be noted that almost inevitably, a "them and us" attitude had developed between the school administrators and the students on the flight deck. Several from our cadre had been lost to expulsion and random room searches were becoming more common. It was in this atmosphere that our plot to disrupt the minute to minute operation of the school was hatched.

Classes were conducted in a large building with a voluminous study hall located on the first floor. In this study room, centrally mounted on a wall behind the speaker's podium, was a large, industrial style clock. This clock was linked to a building-wide bell system that signalled the beginning and end of class. It was decided that the clock was a perfect metaphor for the controlling nature of our teachers. It was also decided that, naturally, we would blow it up.

Kirsh was a white guy with an afro. He had a peculiar musculature that pre-disposed him to a sort of "Mr. Natural" gait. This was appropriate because Kirsh was also quite an acid head. He had wild bulging eyes and punctuated almost every sentence with "you know, man?" or "right man?". Anyways, Kirsh had a beef with school authorities and was an enthusiastic volunteer. Along with Kirsh and me, our merry band consisted of my roommate Spike, and Will-eye, a redneck from Pennsylvania.

A day was chosen at random but our execution was anything but haphazard. We met at midnight (after bed-check) in my room and proceeded from there.

The school employed a night watchman that, not surprisingly, was an old drunk. We called him watchy-bat. Spike was dispatched to locate watchy-bat. Our plan was for Spike and Will-eye to monitor watchy-bat and Kirsh and me to set the explosive. If the drunken watchman wakes up, Spike and Will-eye will run and alert us. It sounds like a good plan.

Spike returns and he has found watchy-bat asleep on a padded bench in the dining hall. It is time for action. Kirsh and I head for the study hall while our partners keep lookout. While slipping through

the shadows of the campus, we are emboldened by the thoroughness of our preparation. This is fun! We arrive at the building and easily pass through the front door. Before us are the wide open double doors of the study hall. Side by side we enter. High in front of us, eerily illuminated by the moonlight, is the clock. It is the only thing alive in this big quiet room. We eye it like a hunter stares at his prey. It boldly ratchets its second hand, each tick a salute to our enemy – the school administrators.

"I want to see it go, man" says Kirsh.

This is a departure from our plan. We are supposed to set a cigarette delay and get the hell out of the building.

"What?! We can't watch it!" I say.

"Come on, man. It'll be cool and then we'll split, right man?"

I knew right then that we would stay and watch it go off. Kirsh knew too. He knew that I, as a co-conspirator, could always be counted on to do the right/wrong thing.

So the bomb was placed behind the clock and a 6" piece of visco was hand lit. Kirsh and I retired to a safe position 50 feet away behind a study cubicle. BOOM!

Talk about "time flying". The clock jumped 30 feet off the wall and fell to the floor with a satisfying crash. Kirsh turned to me and said three words: "Un-fucking real, man."

We booked out of the building and scurried up to our room to meet our home-based accomplices. They reported that watchy-bat didn't even wake up! No one will know until 7:00 a.m. tomorrow. We disbanded to our rooms and tried to sleep. It is hard to rest when the revolution has started and nobody even knows it yet.

The next day scheduled classes were disrupted – but not very much. The bell system was operated manually. Surprisingly, our fellow students weren't aware of the metaphorical value of our actions. I was amazed to see so much ignorance in a house of higher learning.

Of course a disciplinary meeting was quickly convened with me as the target of the investigation. Featured was a beer-bellied local constable who asserted that he could match my fingerprints with those removed from the salute. (yeah, sure.) Also testifying was Mr. Stein, a "nazi" history teacher who attempted a pathetic entrapment ploy that was easily eluded by this young 16 year old pyro.

In the end however, I was suspended for two weeks even though no conclusive proof was ever offered. This episode itself was perhaps the most instructive lesson of my prep school experience. That being: if you're guilty, you're guilty – the rules of evidence notwithstanding. ☿

LANCE VÆRCK

## CROSSROADS

*...Nessun maggior dolore  
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice  
Nella miseria.*

DANTE, *Inferno* V, cxxj-cxxij.

Jesse glanced furtively out the slats as the clack-ety-clack of a crossroads announced another town. Shit, Jesse thought, still in Illinois. A singularly bleak, stark, and cold place in February. "Land of Lincoln," huh? Figures. Well, he can have it, Jesse mused, as he read the water tower announcing Fairfield.

The cattle car was abysmally loud and cold, and Jesse's only comfort was that it beat a jail cell. Yeah, you bet it did. Jesse's brother, Johnnie, "Reb," had covered himself as best he could with hay in the corner, where he did his best to sleep. "Jess?", Reb muttered, hearing the crossing and inquiring, with no real hope, whether they were there yet. They both knew that they'd get home. Question was, was home far enough? How bad had the blast been? Had they killed anyone? Lord, they hoped not. It had been a prank, an accident. How could they have known? Jesse huddled next to his brother and retrieved the battered Sony Walkman from a tattered pocket and resumed his scanning of the airways for news – a dreaded but necessary task. The brothers' minds gnawed away at the same torturous thought, "Dear Lord, let us not have killed anybody."

It hadn't been a good year for the brothers. They had started doing fireworks on the carnival circuit, at which they excelled. They had been trained by a crotchety, volatile and cantankerous old man of Mediterranean origin. He had methodically and thoroughly taught the boys about professional fireworks – the chemistry, the construction, the set-up, the display.

The brothers had struck out on their own, after the strange disappearance of their mentor and teacher, whom they'd lovingly dubbed "the Old Man." They were both at a loss as to why such a master of the art of fireworks had taken so much time and effort to teach them what he knew.

They'd all met one night several years earlier at the Albany, Georgia, State Fair. After the fireworks were over, the brothers waited until all had gone home except the few lovers and drunks that traditionally find themselves leftovers at such events. Harmless enough, they thought, as they scaled the cyclone fence that enclosed the fireworks area. They weren't there to steal, after all. Jesse and Reb had always harbored more than could ever be described as a strong interest in fireworks. No, this was a passion. Some damned shrink would have called it an obsession, but so what?

The mortar lines were emplaced for the next several night's shootings, and this was their first up-close look at REAL fireworks. Entranced, the brothers wandered down the lines of mortars ("Gee, Reb,

these things ain't rockets a'tall"). Jesse spied what looked like a small Frisbee with all sorts of string attached to it. It was cardboard, and the strings had clearly been broken. Yet an intricate and organized pattern remained a telltale of some unknown craftsmanship. The brothers studied it in awe. Next came the flag. Not the same kind they saluted; the one here had fifty stars. Theirs had but thirteen, crossed diagonally. Yet the pattern could be adapted... It all seemed to be strung together with paper fuse. Yes, there was much to be learned here.

Out of the shadows a short, barrel-chested figure appeared, as though a part of the night itself. Silent and slow, with the dreadful stealth of a big cat, the man approached within whispering range, despite the autumn's fallen wealth in hues of brilliant to dusty gold, red, and purple. A dry autumn, the leaves of the nearby oaks and maples were sent dancing by a newborn breeze. Yet none crackled beneath the workboots of this man.

"That's quickmatch," said the stranger, chuckling lightly as the brothers nearly leapt from their skins, Jesse instinctively whipping their third brother into place: a Smith and Wesson Model 66 revolver, chambered in .357 Remington Magnum.

This amused the stranger to no end. He could easily see the five jacketed hollow-points riding in their cylinder; a sixth surely aligned with the barrel.

A gale of laughter brought about the man's first words. "Gottsha!", the old man cried, tears running down his ruddy cheeks as he fought to control his laughter. This was odd, thought Jesse. Few men found the business end of the S&W an amusing sight. A lunatic, then.

The smiling face before them, swarthy complexion, stubble beard, and steely grey eyes turned cold.

"Hell of a way to treat an old man, come to say hello," the stranger said. "I thought I saw one of those damned Orientals go blind; you got to find 'em 'fore some kid do. Now put that thing up and help me find it," the old man commanded.

Jesse simply did so, wordlessly tucking the pistol in his belt. "You do the fireworks here, Mister?," Reb asked with some awe. He'd always wanted to meet such a man - a Fireworks Man - as had Reb.

The man picked up a jagged piece of plastic and snorted, in apparent disgust.

"No. I sell them some of what I make. And then they go and do THIS!", he shouted at the broken little plastic orb, which quickly found its way under a crashing workboot.

"GUASTAMESTIERI!", snarled the old man. Then his face softened and relaxed some. A shy smile crept across a now embarrassed face.

"Please forgive me, boys. I get upset when they take my work and chain it to this HORSE BRAND SHIT!"

The boys saw the old man's attempts to control what was obviously a savage temper. Yet they saw a kindness there, too, not unlike that of their father,

now only a memory. This man was spontaneous, emotional, but in some way clearly honorable. In a glance the brothers exchanged a day's worth of conversation. It said, "Yes, dangerous to be sure. But not to us." Intuitively they knew he had come for them, not for the "blind Oriental," whatever that might be.

Yet sure enough, a parched little ball was there, in the high grass, wet with dew. Reb had stepped on it.

"What went wrong with it, Sir?" Jesse asked as he examined the sorry little thing. An elder, no matter how eccentric, is called "Sir" in places such as Georgia.

"Timer, son. See the cross match...?"

And there began the Waters' brothers tutelage, under the old man's patient steel grey eyes.

He lived simply, in a small country house of native pine and tin roofing. His trappings were not ancient, but seemed to be intended to appear so. A shop adjoining the shanty was where he spent his waking hours. His home, tools, and surroundings suggested the appearance of movie props. His bed was never clearly slept in, and though a good tutor, he remained an enigma to the Waters brothers.

And it seemed to show in their faces. Confusion, fear, disbelief. They couldn't be masked. The old fellow himself seemed most out of place at all. An Italian back in the piney woods of Georgia, making fireworks? No. Yet they went to county fairs and carnivals where he was known with great respect. A little too much, really. The carnies and country folks beheld the brothers as though mad. It was as if Jesse and Reb were the only ones left out of some monstrous secret.

Whatever he had been, or appeared to have been, ceased on a foggy morning in late October. Jesse and Reb had rented a mobile home just across the tracks, headed for town, but a few miles shy of being to town. They arrived one morning to work with the tension as thick as the fog. Something was amiss here, and it couldn't be ignored any longer. The good folks at the local watering hole shunned the boys, and it became clear that the only tracks in the red dirt road were theirs; the aged Italian never left his place. Not on wheels, at least, though he owned an old Ford pick-up, which seemed as much of a prop as the other stuff. The pick-up's tires had sunk into the red clay soil after the last hard rain, and that was a month ago.

That October morn was the one they knew had to come sooner or later. As they made their way through the fog, Jesse driving, the brothers were silent. They knew the time was here. Through the fog they could see kudzu laced across the road that they'd rode on the night before after work. Their tire marks had vanished. Jesse checked the Smith & Wesson in the glove box. He put it in his waistband wordlessly, Reb and Jesse exchanging knowing glances. Reb motioned with his head to the rack be-

hind them, where the double 12 gauge rested. Jesse loaded and checked it, then nodded to his brother. Ready. Not really, and they knew it, but as ready as a country boy could be.

They were right; they weren't ready. The old man's house was a tangle of kudzu and poison oak. The tires on the truck were flat, and had clearly been so for years. Vines from the big live oak swirled around the fenders.

They could go in, but they knew what they'd find: more of the same; rats, brown recluse spiders in webs at head level; probably a water moccasin here and there. No, this was enough. "You only mess with what you understand," their father's words came back to them simultaneously. Good, good advice.

And so it had all been an illusion, a dream. All vanished. Time to go. Time to run. Time to leave this place. Whatever had been was gone. Adios, lads.

And yet whatever the old *fugiste* had been, "haint" or not, he had been a friend, hadn't he? Yes, he had. He'd taught them well. They were now skilled pyrotechnicians, and that foggy morning they opened up Scratch's package store, and shook off the goosebumps of the morning with a whistle of Rebel Yell. That seemed to put the day into perspective, although they'd seen something that they both knew is never seen without some price. And they had yet to pay it, they both knew. That would have to wait.

The brothers worked the carnival circuit, going from Birmingham to Nashville to Little Cock,... er... Rock, that is. You know, the home of our president. From there the troop made its way about the country, eventually landing in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

It was early September when they got fired. The brothers saw it as the fault of the Burnem & Helly Circus. Jesse and Reb were the pyros, dammit, and they didn't know squat about assembling rides. But they made them do it anyways, in the freezing cold that is a hell only a Southerner can understand. Who could blame them for breaking out a bottle of Rebel Yell from the locker? And had they put those bolts in wrong or had they just broken? No way to tell, really. Or so they hoped.

Shame that Representative Finebig's daughter was in the car that departed from the tilt-a-whirl. Reb had watched it arch through the sky; its occupants screeching their way through the cold air toward the roller-coaster tracks. Oh, the timing had been perfect. Reb wondered if the folks that climbed out of the wreck, holding each other and thanking God for their survival, had had any notion that the coaster had just completed a dazzling immelman, and was bearing down on them at 50 m.p.h. He guessed not. After all, how much bad luck can one have in a half-minute?

It was a mess royal. Jesse was sleeping, and Reb ran to help, but there was little to be done. The coaster had jumped the tracks, and if anybody lived it was a miracle.

"Gotta split, Brother," Reb whispered, shaking Jesse awake.

"Huh?," Jesse drawled.

"That fool tilt-a-whirl just let go. I reckon we'd better do the same."

"See your point, brother," Jesse said, not awake and listening to the song of the siren. Lots of 'em. Yeah, LOTS. Time to be gone.

Reb was right; it had been very bad. Miraculously, no one was killed, but the injuries had been so numerous and ghastly that, as Jesse said, "Damn the difference."

They had their consciences to tangle with, but damned if that would include the law. And theirs was a particularly onerous situation: two Southern boys, almost broke, homeless, stuck north of the Mason-Dixon line with winter coming on. They could live off the land comfortably in their home, but they'd surely freeze to death if they didn't do something fast, for the days were getting shorter at an alarming rate, and what was now merely uncomfortable would soon prove fatal. "Reb, reckon we'd best find work, or... something else," Jesse said, patting the pocket where the .357 rested.

Reb shook his shaggy head, his blue eyes an essay in misery. "No, Jess, we might poach some deer, but that's as far as I want to go that way."

Jesse knew what his brother meant. The tilt-a-whirl might have broken anyways, and they hadn't wanted to hurt anybody, but they still smarted from the incident. And though they wouldn't have known what bad karma was, they surely understood the concept intuitively, and they'd have no more of it.

"Jess, we know fireworks, right? Let's see if we can get us a job for the winter, save up bus fare, and go home first chance we get. Whadda' you say, brother?"

Jesse knew Reb was right. Poor country boys though they were, they were brought up to know better than to rob folks. It hadn't anything to do with the law, which was rarely a consideration to them. This had to do with common, Christian decency.

After a hitch-hike that cleared them of their debacle with the carnival, Jesse and Reb shoplifted a pint of Jim Beam and huddled under a railroad bridge, where a trooper was unlikely to spot them, and considered their situation. They had no resumes, credentials, or even I.D. Where to start?

"Jess, might as well try the yellow pages. Someone's got to do fireworks around here," Reb said bleakly. It was a long shot and they both knew it. But the brothers were surely due a trifle of good luck and sure enough the area north of Milwaukee had several fireworks firms. All they had to do was call and see who needed employees. Telephones... they'd need change. Reb still had a saettine in his pocket, and as he stuffed it into the coin return slot of a pay phone, he grinned at his brother, realizing that it was the first time they'd smiled in far too long.

The phone booth was instantly white with smoke, and it rocked and pitched from the force of the blast. The folding door flew open amid a hail of quarters, dimes and nickels. An added bonus was the dollar bills that floated along lazily, for this phone had been one equipped to accept dollar bills and give change. There were more coins and currency that the brothers had ever imagined would fit into a pay phone. They quickly collected what they could, many of the bills much the worse from the rather taxing explosion. But what the hell; they were gathered up as well, and the boys beamed at their new-found wealth. The dollar bills were like a series of jigsaw puzzles, but they painstakingly matched the scraps and reassembled them. Not a bad take, all in all: \$37.50.

And so it was with sense that their luck had changed for the better that the job search commenced. And, for a while, their luck soared. The third call landed them a job with Acme Fireworks, of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, although the locals jokingly called it "Damned Beaver." Jesse and Reb lived in a trailer on the plant's property; another piece of good fortune. It was primitive and filthy but it was heaven to the two homeless brothers.

The work was long and tedious, paid little, but surely beat their other options.

All went well for the boys for several weeks, until time to make the polverone. Although their old mentor had taught them how to make the home-made gunpowder substitute, something had gone wrong with this batch. It worked, burning reasonably well, but not well enough to suit the boss, a very demanding man nicknamed Glow Worm, though not called that to his face. Glow Worm sputtered and railed, his face beet red (thus his nickname) as he lambasted the brothers for wasting nearly three hundred pounds of chemicals.

"I don't care what the hell you do with this lousy crap, just get rid of it!", Glow Worm bellowed. "I want it out of this plant TODAY!"

Jesse and Reb were almost shaking after that chewing out, for winter was here and they still hadn't the means to get home. And they'd almost been fired. And so it was with urgency that Jesse dragged out the fifty-five gallon drum, while Reb emptied the seemingly endless powder bags of their rejected polverone into it.

Reb was about to seal the drum; they had planned to borrow a boat and deep-six the whole thing in nearby Crater Lake, when Jesse, who'd been gazing pensively at the thing, said, "Reb, sure seems a waste just to scuttle this stuff. Works O.K., or close to it. Just cause Ol' Glow Worm doesn't like it doesn't mean it's worthless."

"Thinking on selling it, Jess?", Reb asked darkly. They both knew they'd be fired if caught doing that.

"Not thinking on selling it, no. I was thinking on setting it off someplace. Look at it, brother. It's jam-packed with good powder, I don't care what Glow

Worm says," mused Jesse.

Reb was tickled by the thought, but at the same time horrified. "Jess," he said, "we set this thing off anywhere near here and we're fucked. Too much powder, man. We'd break windows for forever and Glow Worm would turn us in. I'd love to do it too, but we'd really better toss it in the lake."

And at this moment the first inkling of the thought that was to bring them to their Waterloo bubbled forth from Jesse's mind. Reb had seen this look on his brother's face before and it meant, invariably, trouble. Reb shrank from it, for he knew from the gleam in Jesse's eyes that it would be big trouble this time.

Jesse's gaze grew dreamy and distant. Slowly, a crooked smile crept over his face; a smile not unlike that of their mentor.

"Okay, Reb, you're right. We'd better just dump it in the lake. But what you say we put a real slow chemical time fuse in there with it? Remember those acid/chlorate jobs Skeeter taught us about? He learned 'em in 'Nam, as I recall."

Reb was nonplussed by the idea. What the hell could that harm? "Jess, how long would it take to go? And what would it do?", Reb asked.

His brother pondered this a while before speaking. "The things work as a function of temperature, as I recall. Skeeter said that in the jungle, they'd go in a day or so. That lake is likely to ice over, so who knows how long? Might not work a'tall. Ice'll be pretty thick. Probably crack it though, what with three hundred pounds. Might even send some flying. Then again, it might just sound like a rumble. You know, an earthquake or somethin'. No telling 'till we try it, brother. But one thing's for sure; nobody going to be out in that God-forsaken place by the time it blows. It's already close to freezing. I reckon folks around here just hunker down for these damned winters."

Reb nodded thoughtfully. Seemed to make sense. "How do you make one of those timers anyways, Jess?"

"Well, you take a little chlorate, a cork, and some battery acid..."

Several hours later the brothers were cursing the cold as they rowed the fishing boat, riding perilously low in the water from the weight of their cargo, out into the lake. They were planning to dump the drum in the middle, but the icy wind was against them. Finally they looked back at shore. Their frozen, aching arms told them this was far enough. Three hundred yards? Yes, what the hell.

They almost overturned the boat getting the drum over the transom, but they finally horsed it over and watched its bubbles as it found its watery grave.

For a day or so the boys were anxious, wondering if they'd maybe done something rash. It *was* a lot of powder, but as the days turned to weeks, it was put out of mind, the hopeful theory being that the timer just wouldn't work. As winter deepened

and the lake froze over, the drum had become a thing of the past. The brothers used their strangely acquired talents to build, string, and pastewrap some very fine shells that awed even the Glow Worm.

Then, riding to work with some of the other crew, they saw a dark shape that looked vaguely like a motorcycle racing across the frozen lake. A truck was parked out there too, unloading plywood. The former was a snowmobile, no doubt, which they'd heard of. But the plywood and truck were a mystery – and a troubling one at that – for it was quite close to the resting spot of their drum of polverone. Nobody else in the van even commented on it. Strange.

On the Monday morning following their odd observation, the ride to work took them past the same spot. This time, a small town of strange little shacks had appeared on the ice. Right over their drum of polverone, wouldn't you just know. Confusion and horror washed over them in waves. What the hell? Before they could find their voices to ask, Danny, riding beside them, commented, "Looks like it's fishing time."

"FISHING!", Reb yelled. Danny chuckled and said, "Bet you boys never been ice fishing. Hell, you guys don't see ice unless it's in a mint julep."

Jesse and Reb looked at each other with identical expressions of doom. Expressions reserved for climbing a gallows, a stroll to the electric chair, contemplating a failed parachute; that sort of thing. Reb shook his head in utter bewilderment. Jesse lightly rubbed his temples, eyes closed. Silence.

The day was much that way. The brothers made inquiries about this "ice fishing," only to blacken their despair. These maniacs apparently camped out on the ice in these makeshift huts, drinking and telling lies, while pretending to fish. In actuality they were escaping the rolling-pinned wrath of their "Brunnhilda" wives. They would gladly perish from hypothermia than suffer a cabin fever that usually led to the flight of skillets, lamps, and all manner of houseware in the direction of our ice-fishermen.

The day was filled with contemplations of options. Tell them what they'd done? Out of the question. Disarm it somehow? Too impractical. What was left? Run, what else? Reb's walkman, with one earpiece, provided the needed inspiration.

Marshall Tucker sang, "Gonna catch a freight train, all the way to Georgia, 'til that train run out of track." And on the heels of that, "Can't you see...oh can't you see...what that woman (well, in this case polverone) she's been doing to me."

And it sounded good. Time to go. Again. No way to stop what might or might not happen. But good to be gone. Good riddance. Oh, to be in the South again. They had planned on it; now their hand was forced.

"Jesse, I just don't see any other way," Reb said wearily. Jesse's head was hung low as he sipped a beer that evening, heavy with the knowledge that this was his idea. Things always seemed to turn out

this way, no matter what they did. Jesse wondered for a moment if this was the price they'd pay, the deal they'd made with (the devil?) whomever that old man had been, for their knowledge of pyrotechny. With that thought came the awful certainty that the damned thing would explode.

The morning found the brothers trudging though the snow with all their worldly belongings towards the tracks. They found a bend in the tracks where a freight would have to slow down, and they could hop on. They'd done it before. No big deal. No big deal except the sense of urgency that pervaded them. It *was* going to blow.

A Georgia-Pacific finally passed by, and Reb caught it first, catching his brother's hand. A cattle car. Shit. The wind blew through the slats like razor blades. But they were out of there after all, weren't they? Yes, and that was what mattered. Well, sort of. There was that drum to think about, wasn't there? Oh yes.

It was in Watertown, where the tracks took a sharp curve, that they saw it. They moved as one to look out the slats to the north, where a greyish mushroom cloud had risen to a titanic height. An industrial accident, plane crash, a lot of things could have explained it. But the Waters brothers knew exactly what it was. And they could see it from fifteen miles. Must have been a daisy.

Wordlessly anguished, they settled back and let themselves succumb to the rhythm of the rails. And the miles rolled by. Jesse monitored the airwaves with his half of a Walkman, but budget crises and foreign turmoil were the only news. And so it went, but outside of Jackson, Tennessee, a garbled blurb, hissing with static, seemed to tell of ice fishermen using too much dynamite. Garbled again, the word "rescue" came through. The the word "explosion".

They wouldn't know until later that it had been a mess, all right, but not a fatal one.

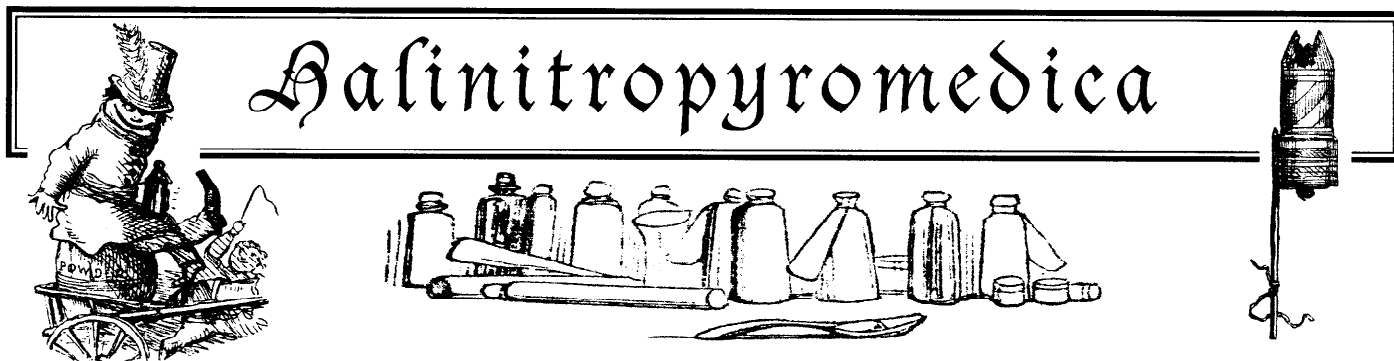
For in Memphis, the train stopped. Who knew why? As they looked upon the green wealth of the South, even in winter, they saw a figure walking lightly toward the cattle-car the brothers had endured for days. The man looked vaguely familiar; the gait of the man perhaps. The brothers were too weary to care.

Then Jesse sat bolt upright, the color gone from his face. He looked out again, and a stocky, steely grey-eyed man was standing by the cattle car. He grinned and laughed, shaking his head in merriment, as the train rumbled forward again. Reb didn't see the man; he was sleeping, exhausted. But Jesse did. The last time either of them saw the old man was in Memphis, at the Crossroads.

Many others have encountered a grizzled, barrel-chested old man who knows a lot about fireworks. He appears where he is needed, it would seem, or at his whim. But if you want to learn from this man, be prepared to pay a price.

In the deep South, blues country, we call it Dues.

EDUARDO TELLERINI



# Galinitropyromedica

Since chlorate of potash was covered in our first article, we thought it appropriate now to discuss medicinal uses of other common oxidizing agents.

Some of these compounds are hardly remembered today, while others would stretch our "dual purpose" theme to the limits. The hypochlorites and peroxides used as antiseptics theoretically could serve as fireworks, but are generally unstable and offer no apparent advantages. Potassium iodate is as much an oddity in medicine as in pyrotechny, but enjoyed limited use around the turn of the century in the same localized inflammations where the chlorate is recommended. As it can liberate oxygen or iodine depending on the conditions, it may be worth remembering. (Potassium iodide, useful in a wide variety of systemic diseases, has entirely different actions and is obviously outside the purview of this article.) Potassium perchlorate (in the bloodstream, this is) has a unique property not possessed by the chlorate. The perchlorate ion suppresses thyroid function! Clinical use has been quite rare, if only because suitable hyperthyroid conditions not requiring surgery are rare. Hypothyroidism, requiring supplementation with thyroid tablets, is a vastly more common disorder. One modern trade-named product, "Tapazole", is used to control hyperthyroidism, but the demand is small enough that it is only manufactured sporadically. We remember one particularly obtuse (and of course agitated and hyperactive) fellow who had trouble understanding this, and narrowly escaped a dose of perchlorate.

Potassium nitrate was a popular medication until quite recently; most members will recall when the small drugstore containers bore directions for use as a diuretic. A typical dose was 5 to 20 grams dissolved in water, repeated several times daily. Other potassium salts, such as the acetate, share the same useful property without being so irritant to the stomach and kidneys. Nonetheless, it was saltpeter which caught the public's fancy, and even many professionals used it to a surprising extent. According to a 1935 Mayo Clinic report, a 13-year old boy managed to choke down six grams daily for a whole year, controlling a severe case of edema. The nitrate ion also reduces blood pressure, although its duration of action is too short and variable to make it useful in treating chronic hypertension. It causes dilation of veins which may lower body temperature, and was

thus a popular remedy in acute fevers at one time.

No discussion of saltpeter would be complete without mentioning its anaphrodisiac reputation. While many "home remedies" and so-called medical folk tales are actually survivals of earlier professional practice, this one does not appear to be. Nineteenth-century authorities list various drugs, including conium and the bromides, for reducing carnal desire – but we have never seen nitrate of potash among them. This legend appears to have originated in the twentieth century, and probably in the military – certainly it was an article of faith among the troops by World War II. It is mentioned in such literary classics as George Leonard Herter's *How to Live with a Bitch* (1969), and in the popular television program M\*A\*S\*H. Personally, however, we must express doubt as to whether saltpeter has this effect, at least as any kind of specific property. Any drug which depresses major bodily functions can have anaphrodisiac effects by default – and impotence is still one of the common side effects of drugs used to reduce blood pressure. In one experiment, taking five *drachms* of saltpeter a day caused "general weakness, lowness of spirits, constant disposition to sleep, and slow and weak pulse" – the latter as low as twenty beats per minute. Being distracted by women was the least of this fellow's worries – and it would be difficult to disguise such massive doses even with Army coffee! It would be safer to rely on the traditional cold shower – or perhaps watch a feminist fashion show.

Finally we come to potassium permanganate, a rather hazardous oxidizer occasionally used in specialized flash powders. The author has a steel can of permanganate bearing the penciled date – presumably the day it was received – of December 7, 1941. We can only imagine how the course of history might have changed had it been delivered under Hirohito's throne, together with half its weight of German Black and a suitable timer.

Potassium permanganate was once widely used as an antiseptic, and is still a worthwhile item to keep in one's first aid kit. Aqueous solutions ranging from 1:1000 to 1:5000 may be employed as skin wash, gargle, douche or injection into the bladder, depending on the infection and one's level of confidence. If used to disinfect the hands it leaves a purple stain, which may be removed with such reduc-



ing agents as oxalic acid or sodium bisulphite. The solution has been taken orally to oxidize and destroy certain poisons, including white phosphorus and many of the alkaloids. In such cases the antidote must be drunk soon after the poison is ingested, while it remains in the stomach and small intestine.

In the African bush, permanganate was used so often and with such confidence that it became a verb. John Taylor, for example, speaks of "permanganating" a beater who was mauled by a lion. In such desperate cases (the felines' bites being especially nasty sources of infections), the permanganate was rubbed into the flesh in pure crystal form. Other famous African hunters swore by it for snakebites, where it is believed to oxidize the protein-based venom. It also oxidizes the protein-based patient, but when one is far from a surgeon this is not all bad, for the cauterizing effect helps check the bleeding. It is safe to say few of these "white hunters", who loved to regale Americans with their exotic tales, knew the original source of their favorite remedy. The permanganate treatment for snakebite was introduced by Dr. Amos Barber of Wyoming, who also served as governor of that state. With this observation we have come full circle to explosives, as anyone who knows the fate of sheep flocks during the 1890s range wars will attest. Whether permanganate was used when dynamite ran out we may never know. At any rate it all reminds us of a time when both politics and medicine were not completely closed to people with common sense. 1892 - Amos Barber. 1992 - the very model of a female surgeon general!

SCOPPIETTO DULCAMARA, *I.O.O.J.,  
B.M., B.Ch., B. Pharm., P.G.I., etc.*

## THE SAGA OF THE CHLOROPHYLL CLOUD

"What's that sign mean, uncle Bill?"

We were headed north on a fishing trip when we came upon a large billboard:

FARGO NORTH DAKOTA  
BIRTHPLACE  
OF THE CHLOROPHYLL CLOUD

"That happened several years ago," I informed my inquisitive passenger. "I was there at the time."

"Tell me about it, Unk."

Thus, for the first time in years, I began to tell the story...

In early August 1993 a Pyrotechnics Guild International convention was held in Fargo. A group of us were gathered together in the empty sheep barn at the state fair grounds. We were a diverse group with various occupational backgrounds: a sawbones, a vet, a sculptor, a tooth straightener and a couple

of offspring. We had been waiting for the preacher for several hours. We were assigned to the barn for construction of our pyrotechnic presentations by the authorities, who liked to get the "Rocket Men," as we were called, into areas as far away from everyone else as possible. Most of us enjoyed the isolation and I'm sure that more than one of the group appreciated the ambient aroma and nostalgia for certain illicit pleasures of youth. But I digress.

We were sitting around the barn shooting the breeze, eating pork sandwiches, putting together rockets and "special" pop bottle headings, while swatting mosquitoes the size of small sparrows.

About half past two, with open shooting still more than three hours away, someone mentioned that he was getting a strong urge to light a fuse. He described it as a "hump in his back," a metaphorical reference to a dog in a state of serious sexual need.

One of us, who shall remain unnamed, stated he had some chemicals which if mixed and initiated with sufficient energy would produce a good bang loud enough practically to guarantee reduction of the "hump".

When asked where one could fire such a therapeutic device I recalled a swampy area north of the city dump. Almost immediately a chant went up "We can get rid of the hump just north of the dump". Let it not be said that our talents were limited to pyrotechnics. I wonder what they could have done with "landfill".

We mixed the chemicals, capped two loads, piled in the van, and headed for the dump with a growing sense of anticipation. The preacher was late, but we couldn't wait, and we had to leave without him.

With Dylan's nasal intonations and frequent "get rid of the hump just north of the dump" recitations, we bounced across the prairie.

Several miles out of town we came across a large railroad embankment which intersected our apparently abandoned road. We drove up and over the tracks and there it was, a swampy area surrounded by heavy grass and weeds four to five feet tall. A bridge that crossed the water appeared to offer an excellent spot from which to drop a load.\*

We tied a long string on the device and attached it to the bridge so that it could be retrieved in case of failure. We lit the fuse, dropped it in the water and promptly retired behind the van. After what seemed like minutes, a "WHOOMPH" was followed by a good sized water spout.

The general feeling was "Fun, but no release."

Realizing that the water muffled the blast, we walked back into the field with the tall weeds and lit the fuse to the second device. We retreated hastily to the van and waited. The breaths came faster and the hearts pumped harder when BOOOOM!!! The sun disappeared and the entire sky turned green. The van was camouflaged with green bits of vegetation

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\* *metaphor optional.*

and several green men stood with looks of awe and bliss. But not for long – discretion determined that it would be a good plan to vacate the area. We noted as we looked back from the railroad embankment a large round area, completely devoid of vegetation.

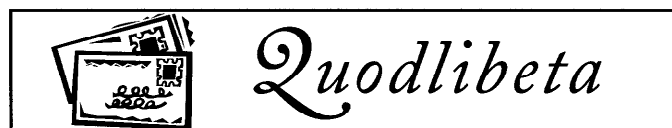
The trip back to the sheep barn was accomplished with alacrity. We'd truly left our "hump out north of the dump".

Later I was told of an orange-vested gentleman standing at the fairgrounds watching the growing green mass in the northwest followed by a large explosion. He exclaimed, "What was that!?" A bystander stated, "That looks like a chlorophyll cloud." After furiously checking the voluminous rule book he hollered, "But that's not allowed!" "What's not allowed?" "A chlorophyll cloud."

"That could make a catchy tune. What do you think, boy?"

"I suppose so Unk, but what's a 'mysterious crop circle?'"

I didn't have to say, "That's another story..." 🦉  
PULSAR



Dear Pasquino,

Thanks for the copy of the last *Case-Former*. I haven't even finished it yet I feel compelled to write. I believe it is possibly the most literate, erudite, entertaining publication being published today! I'm not blowing smoke. I read a lot. The two issues (including the *Best of...*) I've read rank at the top.

Eduardo's experience with nitroglycerine brought to mind an experience I had in my basement – age 14, 1953 or so – with the same chemicals. I can't remember all the details. Ace and I had a room in my basement devoted to various chemical experiments (most involving fire of one kind or another), frank sexual discussions ("wonder what it feels like," while viewing Marilyn Monroe's famous calendar), and, primarily, smoking cigarettes on the sly.

We waited until Johnson's Market had some dry ice in, and then launched into it using instructions from an old chemistry book. I'd never heard of Dr. Davis (fortunately, or I'd have been in even more trouble than a certain pipe bomb precipitated, causing a 30+ year hiatus in my pyro pursuits). Anyway, we felt that to explode the test tube of materials properly, it would probably be safer (God protects the stupid) to freeze it in the freezer right outside the door of the lab. After a day or so, we took it out in order to detonate it with a BB gun, much like Ed's experience. The walk up the steps was slow, oh-so-careful with each step so as not to jolt the tube. Something caused Ace to drop it halfway up the steps and it seemed to take about half an

eternity to hit the floor (strange how a person doesn't enjoy the time distortion associated with moments like these when they are likely to be his last on earth). (I must stop speaking parenthetically but it seems to be required by my disordered thinking or something.)

It hit the step and NOTHING HAPPENED! The story could end there, but it doesn't. We took it to the back yard, put it in the crotch of a tree, got the trusty Daisy pump-action, and shot the tube. The tube broke and that was it, no explosion. We never made it again, but, like Ed, went to making gun-cotton as well as black powder tree-splitters, and smoking, and looking at the calendar, and later attempted making plum wine. Another story.

Hate to bore you with the above, but I noticed some similarities in the stories so thought I'd pass it along. Ain't pyro fun!

...Well, that's enough for now. Again, I love the *Case-Formers*! Keep up the great work. They will become classics in pyrotechnic literature, mark my word.

—AESCULAPIO GIOCONDO



...Readers of *il dottore* Dulcamara's article "Hali-nitropyromedica" on pp. 8-9 of the *Case-Former*, Vol. III, No. 1, may enjoy the following. It appeared in the "50 and 100 Years Ago" column of the *Scientific American* for March, 1995:

MARCH 1895.

"It is a well-known fact in chemistry that red phosphorus – one of the constituents of the safety match box rubber – combines with explosive violence with chlorate of potash; but the possibility of such a reaction taking place in a person's pocket has not been foreseen. However, several papers recently reported that the simultaneous occurrence of a safety match box and chlorate of potash lozenges in the same pocket led to a series of small-scale explosions, setting fire to the clothes of the unfortunate wearer and severely burning his legs."

🦉  
—E.E.

## SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

*News Notes From All Around*

### ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to announce that Mr. and Mrs. Babar Krookshankkee have recently adopted the Wheeze baby. The underweight sickly little squirt was swaddled in a pair of size 56 bermuda shorts and sent packing to its proud new parents. With a diet of treachery and deceit supplied by them, the little monster may thrive. May God have mercy.

# THE USE OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES IN FIREWORKS

*Scire tuum nihil est, nisi te scire hoc, sciat alter.*

—AULUS PERSIUS FLACCUS

Half a decade and half a world away, yours truly sat at the dinner table with a fireworks factory manager, a noted pyrotechnic artist, a notorious expert witness and his wife. Your servant had the temerity during the conversation to suggest that there were potential uses for high explosives in fireworks. The expert witness spluttered, "Why, that would be completely illegal!" Not thus put in his place, your servant responded that just as what was legal or illegal had little relation to what was right or just, so did it have little relation to what was safe; and from a standpoint of safety, high explosives had the advantage over flash powder or even black powder for purposes of generating noise. A fire leak around a time fuse or at some other point can cause flash powder to ignite prematurely; indeed, it can ignite at any time from its making until it is ultimately used, from the merest spark. A properly-selected high explosive will, on the other hand, detonate only from the proper use of a blasting cap, and will be much less sensitive to shock, friction, or flame than are flash powders or any other pyrotechnic compositions.

Indeed, the purported illegality of using high explosives in fireworks is very recent, if, indeed, it obtains in any meaningful sense now that flash powder has been regulatorily re-defined as a high explosive. The earliest mention of a high explosive the writer has been able to find in any pyrotechnic reference is to picric acid, under the heading "Of Detonating Powder from Indigo," in James Cutbush's *System of Pyrotechny* (1825). As the description is brief, it is quoted in full:

"That indigo produces a detonating powder by treating it with nitric acid, is evident from experiment. As it produces a *purple* light, it might, perhaps, be used advantageously in small fireworks.

"The process described by Dr. Thomson (*System of Chemistry*, VOL. IV, p. 80, *Amer. edit.*) is to boil one part of indigo in four parts of nitric acid. The solution will become yellow, and a resinous matter appear on its surface. The boiling is to be stopt, and the liquor cooled; The resinous matter is then to be separated; and the solution evaporated to the consistence of honey. This is to be re-dissolved in hot water, and a solution of potassa added, which will throw down yellow spicular crystals, consisting of *bitter principle*, combined with potassa. When the resin is again treated with nitric acid, the same bitter principle is produced. The spicular crystals, when wrapped up in paper, and struck with a hammer, detonate with a purple light."

Cutbush thus knew both picric acid and potassium picrate, but quotes no formulæ using either one, and appears to have had no idea how they were ultimately to be used in pyrotechnic practice.

Picric acid as an additive to colored flame compositions was described by Paul Tessier in his *Chimie pyrotechnique* (1883) and similar compositions were quoted by T.L. Davis (*The Chemistry of Powder and Explosives*, 1941) and Weingart (*Pyrotechnics*, 1947). Weingart's warnings that stars containing picric acid should be used only in rockets, not in shells, for fear of detonation from set-back shock, reflect an ignorance of the properties of picric acid that, though sad, is not so sad as that of those who ignorantly repeat it. Picric acid is not particularly sensitive to shock; it was used as a cast shellfiller in French 75-mm. artillery projectiles during the first World War, and these, it must be agreed, underwent considerably more shock on firing than does the typical firework shell. The real hazard of picric acid is the readiness with which it combines with metals like lead and copper to form picrates that *are* extremely sensitive to shock, so much so that they may be classified as primary explosives.

Although potassium picrate (and sodium and ammonium picrates) are high explosives their principal use has been in whistling fireworks, as well explained in the older pyrotechnic literature. There has been some use of ammonium picrate in colored flame compositions, also.

Some years ago the writer acquired a copy of a formula book compiled by Clare B. Allen, a fireworks man active from the 'twenties through the early 'sixties. He had worked in many fireworks factories, from which he had collected formulæ, and had doubtless acquired others through acquaintances. Amongst the compositions listed were several attributed to Thomas G. Hitt, inventor of the "flashcracka" and numerous other commercial successes of the 'twenties and 'thirties. Some of the color compositions contained trinitrotoluene (TNT). If indeed these compositions saw viable industrial use (this writer has had no opportunity to try them), the TNT may have served a purpose akin to that of picric acid in the compositions of Tessier, Davis, and Weingart. Picric acid is trinitrophenol, similar in structure to trinitrotoluene. TNT, however, does not have picric acid's propensity to react with metals to form salts that are primary explosives, and thus has a safety advantage. Moreover, quantities of TNT have from time to time been available as war surplus, and in the halcyon days before overregulation, Thomas G. Hitt may have found some at bargain prices, and experimented with its use.

The black, non-mercury snakes that became popular after Vörbringer discovered the properties of nitrated naphtha pitch customarily contain a quantity of some agent to facilitate their burning. Weingart suggests the use of picric acid. Clare B. Allen de-

scribes, in convincing detail, a process for making snakes using tetryl (yet another aromatic nitro compound). Conversations with a knowledgeable and long-time member of the fireworks industry have confirmed that tetryl was indeed used, among others, by the old United Fireworks Co. of Dayton, Ohio. This writer well remembers the snakes made by United Fireworks as late as the mid-'sixties. They were flat little pellets in the shape of a triangular prism with rounded corners, and the shape and length of the "snake" ash could be varied by how one set them on the ground and where one lit them. The composition was mottled, like a sort of marble-cake, with flecks of off-white or yellowish tetryl clearly visible in the dark grey matrix of nitrated pitch.

This brief tour through pyrotechnic history should suffice to prove that there is indeed ample precedent for the use of high explosives in a remarkable variety of pyrotechnic applications, and, whether "illegal" or not, it ought to be considered a legitimate field for pyrotechnic exploration and exploitation. This having been said, we come now to the "original" part of this essay: "original" in inverted commas because, while to the writer's knowledge none of the technique that follows has ever been set down in print, he cannot claim to have invented it. The credit for that, if aught be due, belongs to the late Bill Hoyt.

The best candidate amongst commercially-available high explosives for use as a noise generator is the pentolite primer. Pentolite is a 1:1 mixture of pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) and trinitrotoluene (TNT). It is cast in cylindrical shapes using thin spiral-wound casings with pressed fibre end-caps (similar to those used in some methods of shell construction) as forms. Common sizes are 1/3 pound, 3/4 pound, and one pound. The industrial use of these primers is as "boosters" in the initiation of blasting agents that are not cap-sensitive. Since pentolite *can* be initiated by a cap, its detonation in turn initiates the ammonium nitrate/fuel oil mixture or other blasting agent.

The best size to use for a 3" single-fire salute is the one-pound. These are about 2-1/4" in diameter and 5-1/2 - 6" long. They have a central lengthwise hole that goes clear through them, about 3/16" in diameter or a trifle larger, and an off-center lengthwise hole 2-1/2 - 3" deep and about 5/16" in diameter on one end, this being the end that is covered with the fibre end cap. In ordinary use dynamite fuse is strung through the central hole, crimped into a cap, and the cap inserted into the off-center hole. This results in a 180° bend in the dynamite fuse and is supposed to avert the possibility of the cap being pulled free from the primer, which would result in a failed blast.

To prepare the primer for pyrotechnic use, we ignore the off-center cap well and enlarge the central hole on the fibre-capped end so that it will accommodate a No. 6 fuse blasting cap. This is best done by using a 1/4" drill bit in a tap stock. Working

very gently, and slowly, shave out enough pentolite so that a cap will just fit; drill down far enough so that it will seat in the hole, its edge flush with the end of the primer.

A No. 6 blasting cap is about 2" long, one inch of which is hollow for the insertion of the time fuse, the balance being filled with the fulminate or azide of choice. Japanese 1/4" time fuse will fit in a No. 6 cap. Cut a piece perhaps 2-1/2" long, making sure that one end is neatly cut square and the powder core is not disturbed. Measuring from this end, mark the fuse 1-1/4" to 1-1/2" in from it. Insert the neatly-cut end of fuse into the cap and crimp using a cap crimper, *not your teeth!* Now tie a knot right at the juncture of the fuse and cap using tarred twine. Pull the fuse through the hole in a 2-1/2" disc punched for 1/4" fuse. It will stop at the knot.

Cut some chipboard strips to the width of the primer, grain with that width. Roll the primer up tightly in the chipboard until its diameter has been built up to 2-1/2". At this point interleave a sheet of 70-lb. kraft paper, 2" - 2-1/2" wider than the primer and 24" long, with the last turn of the chipboard, and roll it up so that an equal amount of paper overhangs on either end. Put a solid disc on the bottom end of the primer (the one not prepared for the cap), and pleat the overhanging paper down in the usual manner for a cylindrical shell. Now place the fused and capped disc into the other end, making sure the cap is properly aligned with its central well; seat the disc, pleat the paper down, and place another thin punched disc over the pleats to hold them in place. Putting a thin solid disc over the bottom pleats, spike the resultant "shell" as for a regular 3" color shell; paste with 3 turns of 40-lb. kraft in the usual manner, and dry.

Cross-match the shell at the mark on the time fuse and prepare for lift using a pass-fire (in other words the shell should be top-fused as in the writer's opinion any shell should be). Because the timing is a trifle longer, and the weight a trifle more, than the typical 3" shell, extra lift is necessary. One and one-half to two ounces of FFA powder is suggested.

From this description it may be seen how the smaller sizes of pentolite primer may be used as insert reports ("pentadelles") in larger shells, or how a large bottom shot for a 10", 12", or 16" or even a 24" cylinder shell might be made using a prepared primer centered in a main charge of ammonium nitrate blasting agent. Every large shell is made more soundly with a bottom shot, and such a bottom shot is indisputably safer than one made with flash powder. Of course there will be those who squeal about NFPA limits of 2-1/2 ounces and other such claptrap, most of them being people who have no experience making shells of any kind, much less extremely large and elaborate ones that call for a high level of pyrotechnic accomplishment. Some of the squealers are self-described "experts." There are those

in our acquaintance who would more candidly describe them as wimps and weenies, and even worse, but this being a dignified publication, we could not possibly venture an opinion. ¶

ERNST PFANTODT

---

## BILL LYMAN, R.I.P.

It is with deep regret that I announce the passing of our friend, Bill Lyman. How difficult it is to find words to express our regret at the death of this splendid man. Bill combined a special charm with unlimited energy and the highest personal integrity. The genial personality and the generous instincts of this fine gentleman will be missed by all members of our Order as well as by all who knew him in the P.G.I.I. I am sure that he will be regarded as an ideal by the fireworks industry he so loved, and he will continue to serve as an example for our inspiration.

I wish to express the deepest sympathy to Bill's family and friends from the membership of the I.O.O.J. We will all miss him. ¶

MILANO GIANSLAVI

---

ED. NOTE: *The following reminiscence of Bill Lyman was received from a long-time P.G.I. member, who asked us to publish it.*

## REMEMBERING THE WIZARD

I first met Bill more years ago than I care to remember. He was a fixture at any P.G.I. convention he chose to attend. Combining a unique sartorial style, a ready wit, an ever-present smile, and a love for fireworks and people – that was Bill.

Bill remains one of the most unique people I ever met in fireworks. What can you say about a man who invented the Gerbe-Morte, the Rocket-e-Morte, the Shell-e-Morte, the Lance-Morte, etc., etc. Bill was the kind of person who always pushed the envelope, expanding our horizons. Sure, some of his stuff may have exploded but who cares. Ron Nojunas was lighting it anyway, and he knows how to get out of the way! This might sound funny and irreverent, but Bill would have appreciated it more than a solemn, long-winded dirge.

Bill was an old-time fireworks man who in his day worked with some of the greats, Vic Barnaba, Benny Bello\*, and many others. He was an accomplished firework-maker. In 1994 he became the only man to enter *all* of the P.G.I. competition categories. For this reason alone he should be remembered. I once asked him why he didn't build cylinder shells, why he had switched to ball shells. He said, "Oh, I already know how to build them, now I want to learn

to make ball shells or maybe a combination of the two." He then told me that he planned to make cylinder shells for the Muskegon convention in 1996 as a surprise for everyone who didn't know he could do it. He also told me that he wasn't sure of his memories after all of the medical problems, including open-heart surgery, that he had undergone. I told him not to worry about it, if need be we would find someone to light all of his entries, and not all of them could possibly explode. Bill was still laughing at that two days later.

In closing I'd like to tell you my three fondest memories of Bill.

I was out on the line with the Safety Committee this year. When Bill asked if anyone wanted to light his twelve, Ron Nojunas and I were loud in our protests of what it would do, or how loud the detonation would be. Someone remarked during this exchange, "it sure sounds like that guy has no friends." Ron looked down upon him and said, "No, everyone here is his friend. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here."

The next night, after one of the most boring product demos I have ever seen, we had the Gerbe competition. One competitor's entry was supposed to have twenty effects. When lit the resulting explosion rocked the stands. The second of the pair performed exactly the same way. The announcer said, "Well, at least he's consistent." As the contestant's name was about to be read, everyone around me chimed in, "Bill Lyman!" The next day, Bill showed up wearing a badge saying, "Bill Lyman, Inventor of the Gerbe-Morte."

My fondest memory of Bill was when at dinner one night he told me I could piss off a roomful of people just by walking in. Then he told me if I didn't come to next year's convention, he would not have any fun.

I spoke with Bill only a few days before he died, and he told me he was ready for the convention, ready and waiting. Bill's friends will miss him, for he had more than one can count. The P.G.I. will miss him – he was one of its finest members. The fireworks world will be quieter with his passing. How will the Guild ever be the same without him?

PAUL BREGEL

---

\* *When I last spoke with Bill Lyman he gave me a formula for a "strong white fountain." He said it came from Benny Bello, "one of the old East Coast Italians," as he put it. Here it is:*

|                                                  |       |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Barium nitrate . . . . .                         | 6     |
| Saltpetre . . . . .                              | 1     |
| "Standard aluminum"<br>(possibly #808) . . . . . | 3     |
| Sulphur . . . . .                                | 1     |
| Atomized aluminum . . . . .                      | 1-1/2 |

*Properly consolidated in an appropriate case, this should not give a "Gerbe-Morte."*

# Ask Eduardo

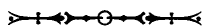
*De omni re scibili, et quibusdam aliis.*

—VOLTAIRE

Dear Eduardo,

I'm puzzled over my apprehension in my recent bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. What went wrong? Help!

TIM M.



Dear Tim,

You did everything right except ride home without a license plate and with a Glock on your hip, you dumb-ass. You came so close to pulling it off, too.

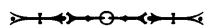
On the positive side, though, that was a sweet little firecracker you boys put together. My hat's off to you.

And nobody likes the damned Feds. Let's face it, we all wish they'd just go away. Yet all in all, the nursery taking heavy losses and such, a much smaller device, well disguised and delivered to a specific target, would have been more in order.

Next time try taking several stacks of computer paper and either nitrate them, soak them in a solution of PETN or RDX, and deliver them to your target's office. Collateral casualties will be minimal, and if you plan well, you won't be caught. Remember, think of these things ahead of time.

Thanks and good luck.

—EDUARDO



Dear Eduardo,

I am contemplating a very special display at the next PGI Convention. This will include a "dunce-pack" fustilage of 200 "crap" shells. This is more "crap" than even I have ever shot! I am proposing this event in an effort to determine what the odds are of creating a large, deep hole in the ground vs. one giant flowerpot that sprinkles unlit pellets of class B explosives that I have been known to sell out of the back of my van prior to my career as a pyro stoolie.

Would it be appropriate to ask that the P.G.I. fund this vital information gathering exercise? Naturally, I won't do any work, lest I get anywhere near to a ACTUAL FIREWORK, but I am willing to direct, pontificate and otherwise bluster and blather on about the intricacies of the aforementioned project.

I am not looking for any money for this urgent research project, but it will cost you \$3,000 for my materials: donuts, coffee, etc.

Whaddya say?

K.K.

Dear K.K.,

I believe you have touched on an area that does need research and could quite possibly be financed by a grant from P.G.I. funds.

However, be advised that after your research, you must write an article for the Bulletin, so woefully lacking in information content or actual meaningful information, that the Officers will have to refuse to pay the grant until you fluff it up and rewrite it so it is at least half a page long. However, you may still point to your publication in court as your proof of being an expert.

Also, as information, we will need to know if you will be the President, General Manager, Vice President, General Counsel, Research Assistant, Technical Assistant, CEO, or Lackey of your research lab this year? You can be something different each year, but you cannot be more than two in any one given year. That is of course, unless you keep changing the name of your labs or companies or develop some new RapCrap or regulate yourself out of business, at which time you can become an extortionist.

Please advise.

—K. RAND

(standing in for EDUARDO)

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## THE FUGEY'S LAMENT

(Air: "Tit-Willow," from *The Mikado*,  
by Sir Arthur Sullivan)

One day in the park  
I a pyro espied,  
O! 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

As with care he his  
bundle of fireworks untied,  
O! 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

With mortars and bombs  
and skyrockets inside,  
O! 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

: Then with ashen-faced grief  
he himself was beside,  
O! 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

For even if with laws he  
most truly complied,  
O! 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

His prospects in court  
down the drain would subside,  
With 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

Petition in hand,  
I ran up to his side;  
It's not weakness of intellect  
Pyro, I cried -  
Not a very tough problem  
for you to decide  
About 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko!

With a nod and these words  
then the pyro replied,  
No 'sanko, Ko-sanko, Ko-sanko.

Recently one of our officers attended an auction to purchase a set of Gilbert and Sullivan records, more for personal enjoyment than organizational use. Recent victories have been so comprehensive that the incisive satire of Mr. Gilbert would scarcely find any worthy targets left in the P.G.I.

However, we took advantage of the sale to acquire several lesser products of the musical stage at a very modest price, among which was *The Sound of Music*. Unlikely as it seems at first, the cheerful tone of this production is not unlike the current state of our Order. Certain details would have to be changed: for example, where the nuns could at best only "Climb Every Mountain," we might well "Shake Every Mountain," or perhaps "Level Every Mountain." The project received another flash of inspiration from Miss Giulietta Andriani, who, on a recent episode of the news program "60 Minutes" showed us some favorite things we never expected to see.

Here, then, from the genius of Richard Rocketts and Oscar Hammerschell, is the I.O.O.J. version of

## OUR FAVORITE THINGS

Heavy steel mortars which load from the muzzle  
Musical satire by Bishops who guzzle,  
Brown paper cylinders tied up with strings -  
These are a few of our favorite things!

Single-malt whiskies and rich seafood chowders,  
Chlorates and sulphides and fine metal powders,  
Elephant rifles with gold-plated springs -  
These are a few of our favorite things!

Girls in black dresses with cleavage outrageous,  
Maximal passion and minimal ages,  
Chinese techniques that date back to the Mings-  
We must admit these are favorite things!

When the tax bites - when the law stinks -  
When the agent's a cad -  
We simply unleash all our favorite things,  
And then we don't feel soooo bad!

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# THE EXPERT WITNESS'S SONG

Perjur'd am I by all proofs one can muster, That in the lawbooks can  
commonly be found. Round me the sy-cophants clutter and fluster, And ignoramuses  
Frolick around. Be-ing once paid, I'm no longer a-mu-sing. To Court I  
hie myself pyro-tech-nists to de-feat; Sham-ming and ly-ing past  
all hu-man enduring, Till common de-cen-cy is tread beneath my feet.

## THE EXPERT WITNESS'S SONG\*

(Air: "Virgins are like the fair flower in its lustre," *The Beggar's Opera*)

Perjur'd am I,  
By all proofs one can muster,  
That in the law-books  
Can commonly be found.  
Round me the sycophants  
Clutter and fluster,  
And ignoramuses  
Frolick around

Being once paid,  
I'm no longer amusing.  
To Court I hie myself  
(pyrotechnists to defeat);  
Shamming and lying  
Past all human enduring,  
Till common decency  
Is tread beneath my feet.

\* or, "The Uproar ain't over till the fat guy in Bermuda shorts squeals."



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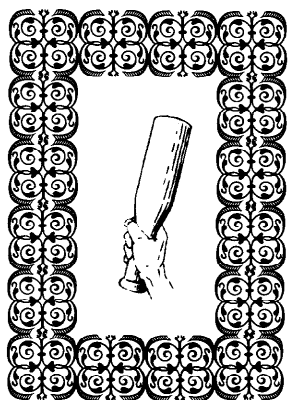
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The Society For the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny.



# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et praevallebit.” – I. *Esfdras*, iij: 4I.

VOL. III

DECEMBER, 1996

NO. 3

## ALLOCUTION OF THE RT. VEN. BIANCO GASOLINI, P.:G.:C.:

The past year has been a good one for our order. Our position has strengthened within the P.G.I., and we have welcomed many fine new companions. Fences have been mended, and as so often happens, we have discovered that those we once thought of as adversaries really share our own views and objectives on a variety of matters. The P.G.I., on the other hand, still suffers some of the very ailments that the I.O.O.J. was formed in hopes of remedying. What, you may ask, has Bianco got stuck in his craw this time? Fair enough question...

It seems that in the past few years, the convention has turned from a gathering of fireworks enthusiasts to one of fireworks groupies and other weenies whose interest in pyrotechny lies somewhere other than advancing the craft through quality and showmanship. “Product demos” now offered every single night during convention week, seem to occupy a large part of the time that was once devoted to competition. Most of these consist of Chinese crap, or low quality domestic imitations of the same, with precious few decent shells to be seen. Most of these are musically “choreographed” with segments of crappo popular songs in the background. I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again... good fireworks don’t need musical accompaniment or anything else. If your fireworks can’t keep the audience’s attention on their own, you’re doing a piss-poor job!

The “product demo” phenomenon leads one to wonder how we got ourselves into this situation, with a good number of wieners joining the guild and attending conventions just to watch a display every night. Most of the above wouldn’t know a good display if it bit them in the ass. Allow me to offer a theory – and I think that recent conventions have borne witness to this.

Those proposing convention sites feel that they have to promise whatever local body they are dealing with “six nights of fireworks” to sweeten the pot. In order for this to happen, they need to enlist display companies to deliver. What we end up with is CF v3s18 nights of commercial quality garbage. If I want-

ed to watch this kind of crap, I could save the cost of travel and stay at home. One of the P.G.I.’s stated objectives is to “promote the production and sale of high quality pyrotechnics”. I for one fail to see how massive displays of Horse brand material help in accomplishing this.

Perhaps what the P.G.I. needs is some sort of review committee, made up of those who are knowledgeable enough to pass judgement. Employees of commercial concerns should probably be disqualified to avoid a conflict of interest. Those proposing a “product demo” would provide a list of what they intended to shoot to the committee, which would then decide to accept or reject the proposal. Yes, I’m aware, more red tape, but for once it would serve to benefit the cause!

In addition, “product demos” should be limited to maybe three nights instead of six. At least the aforementioned wieners would not be around for the whole week, and some of them might quit coming altogether!

The wiener subject calls to mind another problem that has come to my attention. It appears that some guild members have been discussing the special effects shells known as lampare. These have been the subject of much verbiage on the WienerNet lately, (or so I hear from some friends who bother to spend their computer time on same). Apparently some of these sausages have even considered publishing a pamphlet on lampare construction. I can tell you on good authority (the best, actually) that this effect does not use lycopodium, or ChemFX, or mothballs, or any of the other horseshit methods I have heard mentioned in the WienerNet discussions. Lampare are very dangerous shells to build, and only those who have lots of experience in cylinder shell construction should attempt them. If you are well qualified, and have a track record of successful shells, ask me at a convention or other gathering! Those who are talking don’t know, and those who do know aren’t talking, at least not yet.

I enjoyed seeing all of our companions in Michigan. Keep those cylinder shells coming and may Vulcan smile down upon us all!

BIANCO GASOLINI110

## IMPROVISED CANNONRY

Some years ago I did work researching the characteristics of time fuse, and its possible value in replacing some of the countless circuits that many insist on connecting to each shell or effect, which, when involved in a large show, can run into thousands of commands. Ridiculous and unnecessary! Properly done, time fuse can replace many commands and minimize set-up time, since the fuse assemblies are connected to the shells in advance. Time resolution tends to be within a second over a period of about ten to fifteen seconds, when another command is usually necessary when firing to music. Of course the time of digitally-fired or time fuse-fired effects is only as good as the time fuse or spolette on the shell or insert, any deviation degrading the timing of even millisecond resolution digital equipment such as pioneered by our friend and illustrious companion, Ken Nixon.

Of course Ken is aware of this, so he calibrates his shell lift durations, as they are tested, into his programming. As we all know, it's damned nifty and unsurpassed.

Another aspect of timing is more philosophical than technical. When Handel wrote his Royal Fireworks Music, we weren't around to straighten him out on this timing business. And so it was understood that fireworks should be an approximate accompaniment to music or vice versa, instead of a rigid discipline of precision. It all depends on what you're looking for and how you look upon any specific show or effect. It's art, and there is no right way, but sloppiness and unpreparedness are most certainly the wrong ways.

The specifics of this sometimes miserably esoteric field are beyond the scope of this article, although I hope to coax the Master of Montréal, my long time friend and mentor, to help with a more elaborate treatise regarding timing and choreography.

Of course, time fuse can be cantankerous, and each roll has to be tested and calibrated because of sometimes slight, sometimes profound, deviations due to manufacture, shipping, storage, age, etc. There is no constant.

And so it was that I began testing Ruggieri time fuse in my back yard. I tape recorded the spits of each branch of quickmatch as it was ignited by the time fuse. Trouble was, I still had too many variables, such as quickmatch ignition to lift times. This was solved by using dummy shells, beer cans filled with sand, lifted and leadered like any other shell, and their times of departure from the gun recorded and analyzed. They fit perfectly down a 3" pipe. My backyard seemed big enough, and it wasn't terribly loud, so that's where I began the testing.

I suppose someone spent lots of other people's money to publish a study on what I discovered: You

can't always tell where a shell, gone blind, will land. When a can tore through my back porch awning and ripped away most of the gutter, I began lofting them into the woods behind my home.

Mystified by the coughs and smoke coming from my yard, Stephano paid a visit. He just shook his head when he saw me loading Miller Lite cans into a 3" rack. I could only grin sheepishly.

He scratched his chin pensively after watching a demonstration.

"How high do you think those things go?" Stephano asked. Good question. It depended on the lift, the fit in the gun, and amount of sand. I told him all this, and he asked "Do you think it'll reach my house if you angle it right?"

Our grins began slowly, like the coming of a dawn, and flared into enormity. Silently, simultaneously, we had invented a new sport: Neighborhood Artillery. We retreated to the laboratory, lifted and leadered a dozen beer cans, loaded them with sand, and tickled by the idea, prepared for an artillery duel.

Steve lived about 125 yards from me. I took an aluminum mortar from the rack and gave it to Steve. I told him to secure it well, and when I saw him packing it into a wheelbarrow full of top soil, I began to worry. I was about to call him and tell him about the violence of the recoil when I saw him light a Marlboro and start the quickmatch. The wheelbarrow pitched over, the mortar kicking out, and Steve's first round landed in the Giblin's driveway. Lucky nobody was home. We swept it up hastily and dug divots in our lawn, bricks underneath the mortars, tamped well, before we commenced again.

This time we launched from steady guns, observing the wind speed and direction, and making appropriate compensations.

Our first indication that this might be not so lightly taken came when I saw the smoke from Stephano's mortar. It was a fine spring day and the sun was high, and I followed Steve's shot until I lost it in the sun. I ran behind the garage, hugging it, and a moment later round hit the garage roof not fifteen feet from where I was, the roof being considerably the worse for wear. It didn't penetrate it, but it left a shallow crater and split the shingles; I got into the attic under the garage roof and found the plywood splintered. The next rain would be a bad problem. We mended it the best we could, resolved to stop this foolishness and talked ourselves into another duel within an hour. Damn it, it was just too much fun!

We continued to hone our skills to a frightening degree.

One afternoon Mrs. Flowarti was playing bridge with a friend who picked her up, so her Laguna station wagon remained in Steve's driveway.

As usual, we talked each other into a duel.

"Come on, Steve, what are the chances of my hitting the car? I've only got four rounds ready," I said. Not likely, Steve agreed.

As our giddy tradition dictated, we met in the middle of the road, projectiles in hand, back to back, and marched solemnly to our guns. At the flip of the coin, Steve got first shot. He was getting distressingly good at windage, and his first shot tore a large branch off our crabapple tree, disfiguring it badly. Well, my dad had wanted to cut it down, so I, his faithful son, would do it for him, and nobody would be the wiser. I wonder if George Washington got a similar start with his cherry tree.

I kicked my gun over just a bit, having watched Steve's shell catch a slight crosswind at its apogee, and fired at his mortar emplacement. As soon as I saw it clearly, I saw that my shot would be close. It hung in that quartering crosswind a moment and, calculating its trajectory mentally, I began to writhe. My body English must have made me look like I was performing deranged Tai Chi, twisting on tip-toe and milling my arms left, hoping without hope that the breeze would carry my shot past Mrs. Flowarti's Laguna. Yet I watched helplessly as it plunged into the hood of the station wagon. It was a sickening, crunching sound that I'll never forget, as it hit.

Steve walked over, looked at the car, and cringed. He shuffled back to the stone wall bordering the driveway, slumped over, and I shambled over to inspect the damage.

The hood was caved in, and there was no possible way to explain or repair it. The cavity was full of sand, the majority of the windshield and roof spattered with it, and in the crater I could make out the words, "Less filling, only 96 calories."

We considered driving it into something that would wreck the car further obscuring my hit, but even we had a faint semblance of conscience.

I told Mrs. Flowarti the truth, sort of. I said one of my experiments had gone wrong, and Steve was not to blame. Her wrath was monstrous, and I took it humbly, fixing the car out of my own pocket. After all, what insurance company would believe her?

In a field in South Alabama, fourteen years later, I watched Blandford Holiman dig a shallow hole, insert a stick of 40% dynamite into it, and cover it with a 55-gallon drum with the bottom cut out. It was just like when we put firecrackers under tomato juice cans, only bigger.

The drum spun higher than I thought it could, and, history repeating itself, was lazily eased toward Wayne's Ford pick-up truck. Need I say more?

This sort of makeshift artillery is fine sport, and I hope you enjoy it. But leave lots of room, friends, because if it can happen, I promise you, it will. ☘

— EDUARDO TELLERINI

## MISOGYNY BY PROXY OR WHO SAYS PYRO AIN'T SEXY?

"Hey, Ace, who do you know that welds?"

"Stan is great at welding, why?"

"Come on over and I'll show you. It will probably go 'boom' when we get it built."

I had barely hung up the phone and gone back downstairs when the front doorbell announced Ace's arrival. (I could hear better in those days.)

Ace and I were fishing, smoking and M-80 shooting buddies when we were kids. We weren't kids any more. I was thirteen and he was twelve and we knew quite a bit about the world already. We were convinced of that.

I had been harboring the plan every since I learned how to mix gunpowder in my basement in what I called the chemistry room. It actually served as a place where Ace and I could smoke, shoot the breeze, and gaze at Marilyn Monroe reclining nude on red satin in her famous calendar pose.

When Ace got downstairs, I proudly handed him a paper sack. He opened it and his eyes widened as he viewed the missing piece to the plan that would separate the firecracker boys from the "demolition experts" — six feet of orange dynamite fuse.

In those days, we didn't have any idea how to get fuse locally so our plans for the "big boom" had been on hold.

"Where did you get it?" Ace asked incredulously and I imagined with considerable admiration.

I related how when I was on vacation with my parents and twin sister the past week, we had stopped for a lunch break in Leadville, Colorado, a famous silver mining town. We found a cafe on the north side of the street but we had to go around the block to find a parking place. As we circled the block, I spied a sign in the window of a hardware store indicating that they sold mining supplies and blasting equipment.

I gulped down my hamburger and excused myself on the pretext of walking off some intestinal gas or something, rushed up the street, entered the store and asked the store keep how much he got for dynamite fuse. At six cents a foot, I bought all I could with forty cents.

I was pleased with my foresight in leaving the door to the back seat of the Buick unlocked. I arrived at the car before my parents and twin sister and slid the bag of fuse under the front seat where it remained until we arrived home.

Meanwhile, back at the chemistry room, Ace said he could get pipe welded for us and would have it plugged by the weekend, which he did.

Friday evening after school, he brought up the pipe. What a piece of work! Stan had welded a large valve into the one end of the 2-1/2 foot pipe, 3 inches in diameter. The rest was up to us. We accepted that assignment with pleasure and anticipation.

First we poured eight inches of homemade black powder, the ingredients for which we got from the local drugstore, then we placed the fuse and poured in another eight inches of powder. This was followed with some tightly packed crumpled newspaper, then some mud from the ditch out in front of the house.

There it was. Our first large (I keep wanting to avoid the word, but what the hell!) BOMB. In those days, these types of things did not bear nearly the weight of "political incorrectness" that burdens them in our present society. We swept the floor, had a smoke, gazed at that famous calendar longingly and made plans for meeting a mile north of town out by the river the following afternoon. I would bring the pipe and Ace had the smokes.

When I arrived, Ace's bike was already there. We unstrapped the loaded pipe from the rack on my Schwinn and walked west into the woods. We hadn't decided where to place the charge but as soon as we saw "THE TREE" we knew where it needed to be. The trunk of a young cottonwood was twenty-four inches in diameter and rose three feet out of the ground and split into two equal limbs about 18 to 20 feet long forming a 35 degree angle. Talk about sexual aggression. At that time, neither one of us was getting along very well with his mother due to suspicions of our smoking and firecracker shooting. We were both as horny as two barely pubescent virgins with a calendar fixation could be. All that crotch lacked was hair. But then so did Marilyn, or at least it didn't show.

We lodged that pipe snugly between the two limbs. After we had found a large depression behind a tree about 60 feet away for retreat and cover, we lit the fuse and "retired quickly" as the fireworks of our day advised.

We lay waiting and waiting and WAITING! Do you have any idea how long a foot of dynamite fuse takes to burn? We knew because we had timed it. Unfortunately neither of us was wearing a watch.

About the time we were ready to investigate what had caused the misfire, it went off. What an explosion! The ground shook beneath us and following the tremendous boom, we could hear numerous objects slicing through the woods over our heads. Those sounds made us grateful we had chosen good cover.

We ran up to see the results of our work. Numerous trees in the vicinity of the explosion had pieces of metal sticking out of them. Many leaves had been blown off surrounding trees by the blast wave and the tree we had chosen for our first big adventure was rent asunder. The crotch was split to the ground and both limbs were lying there as if in complete supplication.

We looked at each other with unmitigated satisfaction, probably not fully realizing why. This was a turning point in our lives. Our first maidenhead, albeit an arboreal one.

We may not have been completely aware of the symbolism of that tree at the time but we have both been trying to repeat the act ever since.

RENT ASUNDER.

— PULSAR



*De omni re scibili, et quibusdam aliis.*

—VOLTAIRE

I am in despair over being apprehended for a long string of successful mail-bombings. I planned everything so well, yet my own family turned me in. Help!

— TED KACZYNSKI, Block C-4, Cell 18  
#621086, Sacramento Fed. Corr. Fac.

Dear Ted,

Take heart and have hope. You did indeed amass a fabulous string of unsolved bombings. I'll bet you hold the record, but I'll check to be sure and let you know.

You also made some fine improvements technically, boosting your kill ratio dramatically in recent times.

Don't give up hope, Ted. Hell, if O.J. Simpson can walk away from his bloody carnage, you've certainly got a chance. Try writing a book so you can hire the Dream Team, and when you're acquitted, send a little thank you package to your rat of a brother.

But just in case things don't work out that well, why don't you write me with his full name, address and zip code. I'll take care of the rest.

— EDUARDO

## A LAST MINUTE THOUGHT

The bikini is fifty years old this year, yet the origin of its name is obscure. Many thought it the garb of the natives of the Bikini atoll, where we tested our first nuclear and thermonuclear bombs. Not so. An obscure French fashion designer was inspired to name his radical new swimsuit after seeing a newsreel of our nuclear tests in the Bikini Islands.

"Not much left," he observed.

— E. T.



## WAY OFF THE INTERNET

*Mihi quoque spam dedisti.*

— with apologies to THOMAS OF CELANO

By now we suspect that there is not a pyrotechnist (nor, for that matter, anyone else) who has not

heard of the Internet. Indeed, its publicity is hard to escape – and who cannot have noticed, amidst the perfervid attention given in the news media to the immense volume of pornography available on the Internet, that there are also “bomb making” instructions on it? This news, if nothing else, might prompt investigation. Those who have bothered to examine the pyrotechnic resources available on the Internet may, perhaps, have been disappointed if they were looking for detailed instructions on blowing up buildings or the like: what is available electronically along these lines is, at best, no better than what one might find in an Army field manual, and, more typically, is likelier to provide a swift, if messy, way of committing suicide.

On the other hand, people interested in fireworks will discover that there are several well-developed venues for pyrotechnic discussion which have their own unique character. Here, the eager newcomer may be treated to lengthy disquisitions by a seasoned group of armchair pyros. These people will take the novice in hand and guide him to a proper apprehension of the peculiar mores of pyro-in-cyberspace, where one's reputation as an authority is proportionate to the extent of the sententious blather one posts. They will readily censure any trespasses against the unwritten “netiquette\*,” such as a failure to pay deference to the holder of an academic degree even in the absence of any evidence as to its relevance to pyrotechny or the actual pyrotechnic accomplishment of its owner. Stern defenders of established order, these sages resolutely enter the fray on behalf of poor beleaguered regulators and lawyers, ruthlessly putting down any upstart who might question the wisdom of our laws and regulations, or the need of certified Experts to interpret them.

To the end of furnishing our readership with a glimpse of the typical dialogue to be found on the pyro forums of the Internet, we have inaugurated a new column, dedicated to the publication of extracts from these vital exchanges. We hope our companions will welcome this new addition (or, at least, forgive the editors).

— PASQUINO DEI FUGISTI

\* \* \* \* \*

From pig@vnetwit.net Wed Mar 13 13:13:13 1996  
Date: Wed, 13 Mar 1996  
Reply To: pig@vnetwit.net  
Originator: pig@vnetwit.net  
From: Pukie Needlegrin <puke@needle.dork.com>  
To: Multiple recipients of list <pig@vnetwit.net>  
Subject: Re: Fireworks in the 90's – comply or get out!

In a message dated Fri. Mar. 8, 1996  
J. Johnson of Albany, NY wrote:

---

\* For an authoritative treatise on this subject, vide Valentine, B.M., *The Triumphal Chariot of Acrimony*, 1995.

>There is a rumor circulating within the pyro  
>industry that certain infamous individuals, who  
>have recently been ostracized by their peers for  
>similar activities, are secretly pushing for  
>legislation within the D.O.T., B.A.T.F. and E.P.A.,  
>to ban the use of paper packaging in all  
>commercial fireworks. These individuals are citing  
>numerous incidents of personal injury from paper  
>burns and millions of dollars in insurance claims  
>on property damage annually, to plaintiffs, that  
>could be avoided with the use of more politically  
>correct plastic packaging materials.

>I am outraged at the notion of having to give up  
>my craft and business or acquiesce to this idiocy  
>that these so called experts are jamming down  
>our throats. Not only is this an outrageous  
>directive, but it is being perpetrated by a small  
>band of scoundrels who have thrived on the pyro  
>hobby and commerce for years. This band of  
>regulatory panderers is being lead by the one  
>Kon Kospankme who is notorious for these types  
>of selfishly motivated agenda.

>Let's band together and “throw the bums out” of  
>our sight once and for all before we experience  
>the total demise of our pyrotechnic arts.

>James

Dear Mr. Johnson,  
Wo-Wo-Wo, take a big tranquilizer and settle down, you are obviously an emotionally bent individual who defends law breakers and the extremely dangerous manufacturing practices of the past.

First and foremost, I know of no rumors circulating that you have indicated as most of us already are aware of the facts in this matter. It is public knowledge that the use of paper packaging has already been banned from the commercial sector and will go into effect August next, so why you say there are rumors is beyond me.

This attempt to mandate better safety guidelines within the industry is supported by most whom I have had the pleasure of corresponding with even within the PIGG organization there is overall support for this new scientifically sound safety measure. You, my friend, are way out of line with your statements and accusations that I find offensive and off topic to this listgroup.

it is people like you who rush to judgment and attempt to spin the issues with emotion while attacking the character of those who have done so much for our hobby. You attack the very same people who have made our organization a more opportunistic place for all and you've essentially

driven away many with your profound support of Draconian techniques for making fireworks.

May I suggest Mr. Johnson, that you get a clue and either climb aboard the 21st century pyro train or relinquish your interests in our hobby to the more intellectual element before you ruin it for all.

Let's not allow ourselves to bicker over these issues as it does no good for our image, especially in this age of capitulation that has brought us closer to our friends in the regulatory world. We need to maintain and build our trust with our colleagues in government in order to be viewed as a viable and professional group, lest we be divided.

Pukie

\* \* \* \* \*

From pig@vnitwit.net Wed mar 20 20:20:20 1996  
Date: Wed, 20 Mar 1996  
Reply To: pig@vnitwit.net  
Originator: pig@vnitwit.net  
From: Bark Moodah <barkmo@iam.astar.dork.com>  
To: Multiple recipients of list <pig@vnitwit.net>  
Subject: Re: Fireworks in the 90's - comply or get out!

In a message dated Mon. Mar. 11, 1996  
J. Johnson wrote:

>The implications for the recent ban on paper in  
>fireworks are much deeper than its legislative  
>panderers want you to understand. This ban  
>mandates the total elimination of ALL paper  
>products used in the the manufacturing of display  
>fireworks, yes I said ALL!!!

>This means folks, that there can no longer be  
>any paper disks, spolettes, fuse, casings,  
>saettines, lambette, tourbillions or any other paper  
>finish wrap in or on your shells. You must now  
>acquiesce to this idiocy of total plastic compliance  
>or be subjected to stiff fines and possible  
>revocation of your manufacturing license.

>J. Johnson

I just wants to make it clear that to everybody the law says we must listen to them as they know what they are talking about and have much more experience then we do combined knowledge.

If one wants to talk about this subject more he can see all on Tin Pigeons home page <http://birds.brains.calif.u> or can read about it in the new JoP (Joys of Pyrotech-Nots) to be available

to all soon for \$49.95 pp from Kojinxme Ent. Connme CO.

We need to make laws more repressive toward amatures and push for more kospankme courses to be made mandatory for PIGG'ers. It this will make more people knowledgeable toward fire works that are what we need for the future. These peole are smart and they knows what they are talking about. The insurance rates will go up too if we don't get rid of paper to make fireworks with.

This comes from personel communications with my hero kk who is knot dumnd about these things at all. I think people would be very surprised at how many people are doing this stuff illegal in their kitchens and baby's bedroom (not like I do it though) and so I we must do mean whats we say and vote on all the time. If they know what problems could occur they wouldint want to use paper anyway.

Bark Moodah

\* \* \* \* \*

From pig@vnitwit.net Fri Mar 22 10:20:18 1996  
Date: Fri, 22 Mar 1996  
Reply-To: pig@vnitwit.net  
Originator: pig@vnitwit.net  
From: Cheezee Wheezel  
<cheez@wheez.sleez.beezness.chum>  
To: Multiple recipients of list <pig@vnitwit.net>  
Subject: Re: Fireworks in the 90's - comply or get out!

In a message dated Thur Mar 21, 1996  
Sue Meelater wrote:

>I am relatively new to the PIGG org., but have  
>co-owned and operated a substantial  
>manufacturing and display business for the past  
>15 years which was taken over from my father  
>when he passed away.

>Our commercial fireworks business has been in  
>the family for over 100 years manufacturing and  
>displaying a wide range of paper constructed  
>multi and single break cylinder shells of the 3  
>inch to eight inch variety. We rely primarily on  
>the traditions which were passed along to our  
>current manufacturing staff in order to prosper  
>and survive.

>I am very concerned about the future of my  
>business and the pyro field in general with all of  
>these new regulations bearing down hard on us.  
>I cannot survive, nor would I want to, if we  
>couldn't make those intricate and beautiful multi  
>break Italian style shells or those heavy hitting  
>reports that our customers have come to rely on  
>as real crowd pleasers.

>I just don't have the time and luxury to travel  
>around the country to fight off these regulations  
>which are being proposed by some of our very  
>own members, those who have the knowledge to  
>know better and who have taken on a disposition  
>that is unfavorable to the traditionalists and  
>hobbyists among us. These regulatory bum  
>kissers have really done great harm to the  
>industry and have exploited us with their insider  
>knowledge of our craft. This is the most  
>disturbing aspect of the whole issue that I find  
>appalling and beyond repression.

>Is there a solution? Is there hope for survival?  
>I hope that there is still enough passion out  
>there to defend our rights and traditions against  
>this wave of regulatory smoochers and their  
>selfish pursuits. I hope we can collectively save  
>our businesses and maintain a future in fireworks  
>for generations to follow.

>Sue M.

Well, well, well Mizz Meelater, I am taken aside  
on those of us who have done so much for  
improving the level of safety in our pyro  
community. You are not grasping the total concept  
of the socioeconomic implications for allowing the  
continuance of such antiquated manufacturing  
practices that you claim are essential for a viable  
future in our trade.

Don't be blinded by your own selfish ambitions in  
an industry that thrives on the sound leadership  
hierarchy that can only be born from intellectual  
monoliths whose philosophies have manifested  
themselves into the high tech age of pyrotechny  
that we espouse today. Without those, whom you  
vehemently condemned with your vile and  
vindictive words, we are a society of misfits and  
incompetents who are bent on nurturing anarchy  
and lawlessness.

Science has proven that your ways are outdated  
and dangerous, never-mind selfish, under the  
esteemed safety initiative that has been spear-  
headed by our great leader. Your quest to hold  
onto these archaic techniques and practices is out  
of line with reality and shows your true  
ignorance in this highly technical field. Most, if not  
all, of the real pyros have accepted the world of  
plastic which you have denounced. No one person  
that I am aware of manufactures the dangerous  
multi-breaks anymore. All of the successful  
companies today have transitioned over to the new  
order of single break – smoke less – non toxic –  
all plastic ball shells. Wake up mam, and smell  
the fresh air of PC pyro or be remembered in his-  
tory as a non-conformant rabble-rouser.

I am truly amazed that the mindset of people like  
miz Meelater continue to flourish in our  
scientifically advanced society with all of the great  
advancements graciously given to our field by the  
profound experts of higher learning. Some people  
continue to hold onto their barbaric ways even  
though we have informed them of a much safer  
and controlled path with which they could follow.

Cheeze (if it doesn't have a bottom shot, it is in  
compliance)

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Moderator for wreck.pyrotechnics news  
groupies. No actual hands on experience required.  
Must be able to use a Merck Index and CRC,  
and preferably own a current edition. Ability to  
string together technical phrases that look  
impressive to novices a must. PhD highly  
desirable, field not important. Must be able to  
defend other PhDs from the slings and arrows of  
other, less educated pyrotechnists, whether their  
complaints are valid or not. Get in on this ground  
floor opportunity-franchises soon to be available!  
Advance your career! Etc...

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Podunk University, Podunk, Ohio

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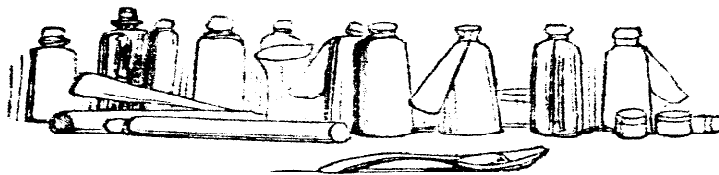
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# Galinitropyromedica



The author had some difficulty in deciding upon a subject for this edition. Like the readership he is anxious to start on the heavy metals – ever so politically incorrect and some of the most versatile items in the lab – but it might be best to save these old friends for later. Gums, resins and the like certainly deserve some attention as well. Then there are items which may have minor uses but simply aren't inspiring enough for a whole article, such as clay for rocket nozzles and for diarrhea brought on by convention food. Calcium silicide makes hot prime and sand may be employed in pull igniters, but in general silicon is one of the more useless elements in the periodic table, significant only in a negative sense when it gets where it doesn't belong.

There are some exciting chemicals in the realm of nitric acid and the nitrated organic compounds, so we may as well begin with the acid itself. As might be expected, the medicinal uses of aqua fortis are few but the results can be quite dramatic. At one time it was fashionable to give it internally, well diluted of course, in a variety of ailments. One physician who recommended it in whooping cough was a namesake of the famous Bristol gunmaker, George Gibbs. But as Dr. George Wood noted in 1867, "I have seen nothing which might not be ascribed to its simple tonic action on the digestive organs."

Nitric acid really shines for destroying pathological conditions of the skin, ranging from naevus to some forms of cancer. In concentrated or fuming form, it was once a popular treatment for everyday warts. Now in this safety-faking and ambulance-chasing age, one can go into a drugstore and find all manner of trade named wart removers, but critical inspection will reveal that virtually every one of them contains salicyclic acid. At best this must be applied faithfully for many days to give any hope of a final cure. An older doctor or a very indulgent druggist might provide a sticky brown solution of podophyllum resin in tincture of benzoin, which is bound to be dispensed with warning stickers suggesting that it is mighty stuff indeed. This preparation may be adequate for plantar warts (its original purpose) but for general use the author has found it disappointing. It is slow, when it works at all, and a few missed applications will allow the wart to grow right back to its original size.

Nitric acid is another story. Its application time is

measured in seconds, not weeks. It is what John Wayne would have used to remove warts if the subject had ever come up in western movies.



*One week after treatment with  $\text{HNO}_3$*

The first order of business is to protect the surrounding healthy skin with a thick layer of petroleum jelly, mounding it up to that the wart is visible in the middle like the crater of a volcano. (The author once tried lanolin and regretted it; the warmth of the skin and action of the acid spread both grease and acid where they were not supposed to be.) When the little hollow is filled with acid from a dropper, smoke or fumes will issue from the hapless wart as it goes the way of all flesh. Half a minute is a typical application time, although it will vary from case to case. The process is basically self-regulating, because as the acid reaches the healthy tissue underneath, the patient begins to feel a distinct urge to be somewhere else.

It is wise to hold out as long as possible in order to do a thorough job. Then wash with cool water and rub gently with bicarbonate of soda (or potash), which will neutralize any acid in the spongy remains of the wart. Nitric acid burns heal slowly but rarely become infected. They often develop mild inflammation and "laudable" pus because of the odd structure of the wound: the first scab which forms is down in a hole and acts like a foreign body, putting pressure on the healthy tissue above. There will be three or four scabs, each one successively higher, until the last is flush with the skin.

Incidentally, before Pasteur developed rabies vaccine in 1886, the only halfway trustworthy way to



prevent the disease after a mad dog's bite was to cauterize with nitric acid. The vaccine was a real improvement, but today, predictably, things have gone to the opposite extreme. Pasteur's trusty duck egg virus culture method has given way to a process using cultured human cells, which was originally devised as an alternative for people allergic to duck proteins. The modern

health system, with welfare and insurance for encouragement, has a way of seeing that such exotic specialties become the standard. Not long ago a man in the author's county was bitten by a rabid horse, and it was decreed that his entire family was to have rabies shots because they had all fed the animal or fitted it with a bit. The human cell vaccine was the only kind available, and while the victims had no religious objections to it, the cost was \$2200 each.

Of the three important classes of nitrated organic compounds, the nitroamines have seen the least medical use. "Cyclonite" was recommended by its discoverer, according to T. L. Davis, but it is probably just as well that it never caught on. Such compounds and their reduction products, the nitrosamines, can cause cancer, and they do not appear to have any virtues which would justify the risk of taking them internally.

Organic nitrates or nitric esters dilate blood vessels, making them useful in angina pectoris and in acute episodes of hypertension. Nitroglycerine is by far the most famous of these, and has been offered in dosage forms ranging from the old "Spirits of Glonoin" to injectables, timed-release capsules, sprays, and transdermal patches. Most readers will have seen the tiny, sugar-based sublingual tablets, which allow the drug to enter the circulation rapidly through the thin membranes under the tongue. Other nitric esters, including PETN and nitromannite, have been sold as commercial medicines, and all these compounds do the same thing with slight variations in the onset and duration of action. It is the profitability of trade names which makes them come and go. Isosorbide dinitrate, under the names "Isordil" and "Sorbitrate", swept the field a few years back but is now available as the generic drug from a dozen different makers. The patent drug firms had to go back to work, and now the fashionable young doc-

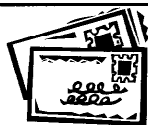
tor simply must use "ISMO", which is isosorbide mononitrate. Thus does science advance.

Aromatic nitro compounds have been used for a variety of purposes. One of the more peculiar of these is that 2-, 4-dinitrophenol was introduced in the 1930s as a weight reducing agent. Because it blocks the controlling enzyme of a vital step in fat metabolism, it is dramatically effective – so effective in fact that people who could not use it with discipline often would up in the morgue. Before it was removed from the market it, too, inspired the me-too phenomenon, with a British drug company attaching a brand name to the ridiculously similar 4-, 6-dinitro-orthocresol. Strange as it may seem there could be yet another chapter to the story. This year while visiting a home with a television set, the author caught the tail end of a broadcast about a powerful weight loss drug from Europe. While he did not hear all the details, the product was apparently dinitrophenol attached to some sort of inert "carrier" molecule. A panel of experts was discussing its possible introduction into the U.S., and how the F.D.A. should respond! This would not be so odd except for the fact that the F.D.A. is the same bunch trying to remove such harmless items as pepsin elixir and fish-tar ointment from the shelves, merely because nobody in his right mind would buy \$300,000,000.00 worth of "studies" to save them.

Picric acid is rightly the most famous of the multipurpose nitro compounds. It is a good antiseptic, with an especially high reputation in burns, and it sometimes relieves severe itching in such conditions as eczema. For deep burns of the face it should be avoided as it may cause permanent scarring. Otherwise a 1% aqueous solution is the most versatile preparation; 1/4 to 1/2% has been used to treat gonorrhea. Picric acid cotton, gauze, and wool were once available but are now a home-brew proposition. Alcoholic solutions up to 5% strength may be used in superficial skin conditions but not in deeper wounds. Finally a 2% ointment is useful on the skin and for burns of the eye. Although the author has never tried it, stains are supposedly removed by washing with dilute ammonia followed by O.T.C. hydrogen peroxide.

One will not find picric acid in the junky, high-volume chain stores, and the safety-fakers have cleaned it out of the school labs years ago. By haunting enough old drugstores with dusty, cluttered basements one may walk away with a bottle of the high-grade stuff. It is rarely used in whistles today because of the mess and expense. Still, there is nothing else which can be used for high explosives, propellants, whistles, deep colored stars, and for treating the burns if one has any mishaps. Safety-fakers in both fields hate it, and that alone is reason enough to keep it around.

— SCOPPIETTO DULCAMARA, I.O.O.J.,  
B.M., B.Ch., B. Pharm., P.G.I., etc.



# Quodlibeta

...I'll get straight to the point – I found an article that appears, for all intents and purposes, perfect for the next edition of the *Case-Former*. It is from the January, 1996 edition of *Harper's*, and called "Blazing Saddles (Obliterating Animal Carcasses with Explosives)." It speaks for itself, especially the part indicating "...where total animal obliteration is necessary, it is advisable to double the amount of explosives used in the first two examples." That means 100 pounds of high explosives!! What is the hell are they talking about? Don't you think 30-40 lbs. of flash would do as well?

— E.E.



## BLAZING SADDLES

*From "Obliterating Animal Carcasses with Explosives," by Jim Tour and Mike Knodel, in the January 1995 issue of Recreation, Engineering Tech Tips, a newsletter published by the U.S. Forest Service. The article appeared in the November/December 1995 issue of Annals of Improbable Research, published in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

There are times when it is important to remove or obliterate a large animal carcass (horse, mule, moose, etc.) from locations such as a recreation area, where a carcass might attract bears; a popular picnic area, where the public might object; or the side of a road or trail. Large animal carcasses can be particularly difficult to remove, especially if they are located below a steep slope or in a remote area.

We have found that explosives have been used successfully by qualified blasters to obliterate large animal carcasses partially or totally.

In a case where urgency is not a factor — perhaps the public is not expected to visit for a few days, or bears will not be attracted to the carcass — partial obliteration is acceptable. The following instructions apply to a horse weighing about 1,100 pounds:

- Place three pounds of explosives under the carcass in four locations (see Figure 1).
- Place one pound of explosives in two locations on each leg.
- Use detonator cord to tie the explosive charges together.
- Horseshoes should be removed to minimize dangerous flying debris.

In some cases it is not practical to move the carcass on to the explosive charges; for

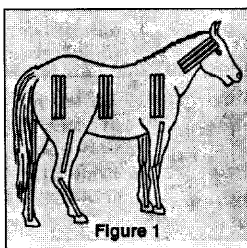


Figure 1

example, the carcass may be lying in water or frozen in the ground. In such circumstances, fifty-five pounds of linear explosives can be simply draped over the carcass (see Figure 2). Use of the entire fifty-five pounds of explosives will provide more obliteration than in Figure 1.

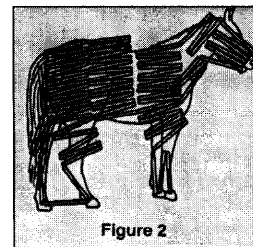


Figure 2

In situations where total animal obliteration is necessary, it is advisable to double the amount of explosives used in the first two examples. Total obliteration might be preferred in situations where bears are particularly prolific, or where the public is expected in the area the next day.

## SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

*News Notes From All Around*

*The Shooting Times* (U.K.) for 12 September 1996 carried a short article which we excerpt here as of possible interest to readers of our articles "Flaming Clays," by Ernst Pfantodt, and "The Day the Pigeons Shot Back," by T. Babington Brimstone (in Vol. II, No. 2, October 1993).

## A SHOT IN THE DARK

It is rare that the telephone rings in the "Shooting Times" office and we are asked to try something completely different. However, once it had been fully explained, clayshooting at night just had to be given a try.

With the editor in tow, a watchful eye was kept on the diminishing light as we made our way to a farm in the heart of rural Worcestershire, where the innovation has become reality and spawned the birth of Shooting Star Clays Limited.

The system uses standard clays painted with special luminous paint. They can be launched from any manual or automatic trap with only minor modification. As the clay is launched a strobe is triggered and charges the paint which continues to glow brightly for the entire flight time.

The result is a brightly glowing disc, hurtling through the night sky like something from a science-fiction film. The targets can be shot with a standard gun and ammunition or with the aid of tracers and the addition of luminous sights. The target bursts like a firework when it is hit, filling the sky with brightly coloured shards of clay.

The two men responsible for the lengthy process of turning the original idea into practice believe it will be invaluable to shooting grounds in winter that have permission or shoot late. The main strobe unit costs £160, with clays costing slightly more than blaze but less than flash targets. Un-

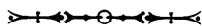
broken clays can be re-used and the paint is water-based and non-toxic.

The flash made by the trap when the clays are launched gives the impression they are being fired out of a cannon. When the system was demonstrated at the World Championships at Goodwood, the response was very positive. Many grounds showed an interest, but it was the international contingent who were most enthusiastic.

The system is weather-proof and works off a standard 12-volt battery. The clays can be left on the trap during daylight without any adverse effects. Shooting Star Clays are a lot of fun and spectacular when hit.

The system will be demonstrated at the Midland Game Fair, Weston Park in Shropshire on September 14-15. A further demonstration is to be held at Lakenheath Rod & Gun Club in Suffolk. For further details contact Rupert Checkley or Andrew Greenhalgh on (01299) 832144.

Noting that luminous paint is rather milkwater in comparison with burning pyrotechnic composition, we must acknowledge that it is also more practicable in many locations – and we view with approval the suggestion that the luminous targets be shot “with the aid of tracers.” We have nighttime baseball and football, so why not a nighttime sport for devotees of the scattergun? Finally it is intriguing to speculate whether Andrew Greenhalgh, one of the inventors of the “Shooting Star Clays” system, could be a member of the Greenhalgh family that formerly owned Standard Fireworks in Huddersfield?



The *Shooting Times* (U.S.), a very different publication from that mentioned above, carries a monthly column by Jerry Constantino with a regular department on “dumb crooks” – sort of like a cross between “News of the Weird” and the police blotter. A couple of items of pyrotechnic interest have appeared in recent columns:

- My favorite this month is the guy who owned a pile of smoldering metal imbedded into the side of a cliff at the apex of a curve, high above a desert road. The Arizona Highway Patrol said the wreckage resembled an airplane crash, but a closer look told them it was a car. The lab guys had to figure out what kind of car and what actually happened.

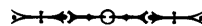
It seems the driver had somehow acquired a JATO unit (Jet Assisted Take Off), it's actually a solid fuel rocket used to give heavy military transport planes an extra “push” for taking off from short airfields. He set out into the desert and found a long, straight stretch of road. Then he attached the rocket to his Chevy Impala, jumped in, got up some speed, and fired off the thing!

Best as the authorities could determine, he was doing somewhere between 250 and 300 mph when he came to that curve. What about the brakes?

They were completely burned away in a fruitless attempt to slow the car.

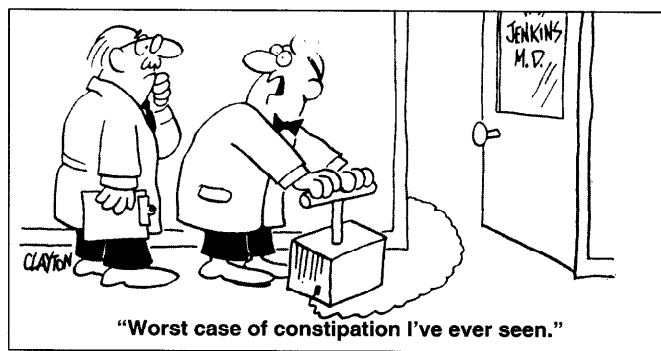
Remember: Solid fuel rockets don't have an “Off” switch. Once started, they burn at full thrust until the fuel is gone. (*January, 1996*)

- In England burglars trying to break into a fireworks factory used a torch to open the door. Sparks, however, ignited the crooks' van which was parked adjacent. The van then sent more sparks and flames into the factory, causing tons of fireworks to explode. The robbers have been dubbed the “hole in the ground gang.” (*March, 1996*)



We are pleased to hear the report that two companions have recently succeeded in making the dreaded potassium picrate whistle compositions without more than a few spotty stains, much less the great yellow streak demonstrated by most recent “experts” who have never tried it, and hardly any more bitterness than a typical P.G.I. business meeting.

The picrate whistle mixes tried, from a trusty late nineteenth-century formulary, were potassium picrate by itself; 3:2 picrate and saltpetre (a good “normal” whistle that compares favorably with the present benzoate mixes and wo' ably even at 100% relative humidity); 3:2 picrate and barium nitrate (*sifflet aigu & perçant*); and, most intriguingly, a mixture of 15:1 picrate and the resin of Socotrine aloes. This last gave a good whistle, with plenty of black smoke (like picrate alone) but burning more stably. We note that a recent article in the *Journal of Pyrotechnics*, “An Introduction to PROPEP” (Vol. I, no. 1, p. 11) featured a “computer modeling” program in which phenolphthalein (the principal ingredient in “Feen-a-mint” and “Ex-Lax”) was advocated as an ingredient in rocket compositions, although the author of the article never actually tried it (at least in fireworks!). On the other hand, the *resounding* success of aloes in whistle mixes proves by empirical demonstration that, if one wants to use laxatives in fireworks compositions, one ought at least to go back to a respectable century and get a formula that works!



Pyrotechnic Farts & Sausages Publishing proudly announces its new book, *The Compleat Wangler: How to Take 'Em Hook, Line and Sink*, by Charlatan Wheeze (still in preparation).

## MUSINGS ON THE "UNABOMBER" AND SOME OF HIS PLAYMATES

*Their webs shall not become garments,  
neither shall they cover themselves with  
their works: their works are works of  
iniquity, and the act of violence is in  
their hands.*

—ISAIAH LIX:vj

The arrest of the suspected "Unabomber" earlier this year, coupled with the nation's overweening obsession with electronic message networks and electronic gadgetry in general, struck a chord in this author. Although the Unabomber was originally named for attacking universities and airlines, he seems to be known best as a modern-day "Luddite" because of his dislike of computers. Although the Unabomber is considered far left, and the author's own political stance would be characterized as far right, our reactions to the computer-age mindset are equally negative. In case any federal agents are reading this we will mention that we did *not* know Ted Kaczynski personally. But in all candor we might not have turned him in if we had, and this realization has prompted a little soul-searching. Some of what follows may not be directly related to pyrotechny, but as Donne observed no man is an island, and in an intensely regulated, homogenized, mass-marketed culture it is becoming difficult even to be a peninsula.

At the very least we ought to ask ourselves why supposedly "conservative" elements in our society are rushing to make themselves dependent on absurdly complicated gadgetry for even the most basic tasks, and practically falling over each other to see who can wallow deeper in the mire of the latest electronic medium, as though we did not have too many electronic media already. At one level the answer is simple — the quick buck — but even moneygrubbers are not the men they used to be. An honest crook like "Public-be-damned" Vanderbilt would probably disdain those who use regulators, lawyers and insurance companies to force people to buy their products.

In this author's opinion the highly touted "computer revolution" reflects an unholy alliance of the worst elements of big business and consumerism on the right, plus big government and social crusading on the left. Both sides are bad enough by themselves, but when they are allowed to feed on each other the result is sheer madness. Computers can be advantageous in certain industrial processes such as printing or controlling machine tools for mass production. They were originally designed, of course, for extremely complex calculations, but most people don't use this level of math in their daily lives. "Paperwork," regardless of how much real paper is involved, has a negative connotation because it is usually something forced upon us by some mindless bureaucracy. "Information", on the other hand, has been endowed

with a glamorous image by self-appointed futurists, not to mention people selling "information systems." Regardless of semantics the majority of computer use by businesses, especially smaller ones, is an effort to cope with the ever-increasing burden imposed by regulators and other meddling third parties.

Upon seeing a computer in a clinic or a pharmacy the layman, especially if he has read too much trendy health literature, may have visions of a patient's metabolic rate and kidney function being used to calculate the ideal drug regimen. While such is possible, and does not require more than moderate skill in mathematics, it is really only done in a tiny minority of cases. Ninety-nine percent of the time the machine was bought to keep track of billing, especially coverage under welfare and insurance programs, which constantly change their rules and are notorious slow-payers. The percentage of medical costs which goes for record keeping has risen steadily for at least forty years, despite the proliferation of gimmicks which are supposed to increase efficiency. The author recently toured a small city's facility, fully computerized and proud of it, which consists of a forty-bed hospital (rarely half full) and a ninety-bed nursing home. There are ten full-time employees in the business office and another seven or eight in medical records! In the days of quill pens, rag paper and *private payment*, nobody dreamt of needing a bookkeeper for every eight patients. The gadgetry, even when it works right, is less an advance than a smokescreen. Even in banking, the heavy dependence on computers is only partly due to the myriad daily calculations which have always been a legitimate part of the business. A program disc specific to the "Fair Lending Practices Act" is widely advertised in banking magazines, and is apparently a good seller. It is safe to assume that the people who first created bank computers, decades ago, did not envision having an entire program for dealing with just one branch of the federal bureaucracy.

On the other side of this counterfeit coin, a startling percentage of so-called free enterprise involves selling electronic gadgetry TO the government itself! Only a few years ago, around 1990, the "conservative" business publications like *Forbes* and *Fortune* were preaching eternal enmity toward big government in all its nasty forms. Now all they can talk about is computerizing government agencies to make them more "efficient", a dubious goal even if it happened to work. John Stuart Mill, who would now be called a libertarian and classed with the right wing, explained that since intrusive governments are inherently bad, *efficient* intrusive governments are something to be avoided all the more. But that doesn't matter to the neo-conservative business heroes; because it is the "computer age" public agencies simply must join the party, and if clever insiders can make a killing on electronic stocks so much the better. Among the non-regulatory agencies the worst offenders are the public schools, which, after decades

of spending more and more to deliver less and less, have decided they need another "revolution". Bureaucrats in general rarely show restraint with other people's money, even when buying the simplest items. Complicated electronic equipment, the vehicle of the *zeitgeist*, is positively sacred: it must not be slighted, regardless of what purpose it actually serves. The author's home town library recently joined the crowd by spending over \$100,000 on a computer system which was supposed to save on labor. Its staff doesn't seem any smaller but the latest financial report shows that another \$13,000 originally earmarked for new books has to be spent on "cataloguing materials". If they were talking about typewriter ribbons and file cards, \$13,000 would have lasted from the time the library was founded until well into the twenty-first century. All this would be bad enough if the computers were confined to the original purpose of looking up materials from various collections, but they haven't been. Among other things, the author was astonished to find people spending hours at these terminals, typing personal materials like school reports and résumés, and making a lot of noise in the process! We have yet to see a library where people are allowed to wander in off the street and use ordinary typewriters, while other people are trying to read, because typewriters are not icons of trendy millennial fantasies. Everybody knows what a typewriter does, and understands that libraries do not exist to lend office equipment. But on the brink of the twenty-first century, it is not easy to tell where tragedy leaves off and comedy begins. The local Chemical Dependency Center recently announced that among other exciting developments, it would soon be advertising on an electronic network called the "internet." Supposing this actually brings a parade of new customers, what could be more delightful than having drunkards and druggies from all over the nation take advantage of county funding?

Our own field has been relatively free of such nonsense, but there now seems to be a rash of people trying to change this. Ignoring the politically ambitious and the net-wits, one might observe the spread of an academic technique called computer modeling. Such methods may (or may not) have value when used by experienced laboratory scientists to narrow their range of choices. All too often they are seen as a substitute for hands-on research, a socially accepted version of the fraternity brat's "dry-lab." They had already been taken to extremes in 1961, when the Air Force spent a year running computer programs to discover the ideal monopropellant. Needless to say the size and cost of the equipment did not deter the government, at the peak of the "cold war" years. All that resulted were theoretical structures of things that would have detonated at the slightest provocation, if they could even have been made in the first place. According to the book *Ignition*:

The Air Force, appalled, cut the program off after a

year, belatedly realizing that they could have got (*sic*) the same structure from any experienced propellant man (me, for instance) during half an hour's conversation, and at a total cost of five dollars or so. (For drinks. I would have been afraid even to *draw* the structure without at least five Martinis under my belt.)

Now, with MicroBrains in plentiful supply, almost anybody can do dumb things with computers. A fellow member of our order told us of a recent article which showed why phenolphthalein should make a good substitute for charcoal in skyrockets. The obvious problem here is not danger but impracticably high cost, not to mention lack of charcoal tail. The author was intrigued enough to mix a batch of composition, 65/25/10, and it did act remarkably like traditional rocket powder when burned in a small heap. But the only rocket made, on standard tooling, behaved very oddly: it burst open and then quit burning entirely. Most of the propellant was still visible in the two largest pieces of the casing. The author has made plenty of good traditional rockets with the same saltpeter and sulphur, and the phenolphthalein was J.T. Baker reagent grade. The computer modeler did not report success rates because – this is the good part – *he never made a rocket*. It takes about thirty-five minutes starting with unmixed chemicals. Although it is a bitter pill for some to swallow, we really ought to purge our field of such laxity, before all common sense goes down the toilet.

Fortunately at least some elements of all fads die down; one is reminded of the automobile mania of forty years ago. At that time "horse and buggy thinking" was the magic phrase used to fight conservatism of all kinds – it did not have much to do with horses or buggies, but was likely to be hurled at those who opposed progressive education or the welfare state. We have all seen those 1950s predictions of the "car of 1990", which was generally long, low and very wide, with a turbine or jet engine. But where cities were once designed around the automobile, it is now becoming popular to copy European ideas and include pedestrian-only areas. Drive-in restaurants no longer have a glamorous image, drive-in theatres are growing scarce, and drive-in weddings never did catch on outside Las Vegas and southern California.

Another magic incantation, "high-tech", is already losing its shine. Originally this term was confined to complex electronic items, and a few exotic structural materials like graphite composites. Now everything from toothpaste to fishing reels has to be high-tech, making the concept all the more repellent to those who didn't like it in the first place. The author recently saw one of the television true-like crime shows, on the subject of the elusive high-temperature arsonist. The reporter said that his exact method was unknown, yet persisted in calling it "high-tech"! Perhaps this makes the A.T.F. agents feel better; they would certainly look stupid if they couldn't catch an

arsonist who was low-tech. They made ominous references to "materials used in the space shuttle boosters," just so viewers would know how high-tech it had to be. Now most of us know what is used in the space shuttle, although we don't employ much in our display shells because it is sissified and generally more trouble than it's worth. When the use of an inorganic oxidizing salt to enhance a fire can be called "high-tech", we can only wonder what the phrasemakers have in store for us next.

Federal agencies, armed with the highest "tech" available, consume obscene amounts of money and make the lives of decent people a regulatory nightmare – yet their record of catching violent offenders remains spotty. According to an August 1995 *Fortune* article on the Unabomber, "Freeman believes the task force can identify the bomber from information stored in its databases... 'I think of it in months.'" But it did not happen; the Feds eventually gave in to Unie's demands and published his "Manifesto". The suspect was caught by the most timeworn of methods when someone close, his own brother, turned him in.

Much as we may admire Unie's elusiveness, we can't agree with all of his anti-industrial stance. Up to a point the products of industry really do improve our lives; the trouble is that most present-day Americans want to enjoy these luxuries without getting their hands dirty, so they become paper-pushers, or worse yet, button-pushers. The actual production of useful goods gets farmed out to foreign countries, which grow richer while we sink further into debt. Americans do need to be more frugal: if we must drive automobiles we might demand simple, high-quality ones with a design life of at least twenty years. Instead, the fashionable still buy new cars every few seasons, but they get half of them from overseas. The right way to deal with the evils and excesses of big business is simply to refuse to buy its products; if only we could stop the government from buying them as well we might really do some good.

While the media types fawned over Unie's hand craftsmanship, he didn't even make particularly good bombs for a Harvard man – of course he *was* graduated in the 1960s, after the rot had set in. If the reformers and revolutionizers keep it up they may eventually provoke people who can do the job right. So far, most of them haven't been worth the powder.

The author's highest expectation from the new society is simply to be left alone. He doesn't want Hillary's health plans, because most of his medications literally grow on trees, and he laughs at the Brady Bunch, because his fifteen-shot assault rifle is legally an antique. His modest stock of fine clarets should be prime in about ten years, and he knows where there is enough Paris green to last well into the twenty-first century. There is a small but viable

chance that we will again have a world where baby boomers are small report units, conspicuous consumption is advanced lung disease, floppy discs are seen mainly in bad backs, and "software" would be interpreted as lacy lingerie. On the other hand, we might end up with the streets full of rioters who can't add up a grocery bill without electronic assistance. If that happens, we hope to go out shooting, perhaps in the company of a sassy redhead who will turn up her little nose and say, "Let them eat chips!"

— T. BABINGTON BRIMSTONE

## THE MIS-ADVENTURES OF DR. DO-LATTLE

(Tune: "Talk to the Animals")

If you can talk to the cyber-geeks – learn their languages –

As you study for your Ph.D.

Though there's nought in your curricula

Pyrotechnic in particular,

O, ever so enlightened will you be!

I am a martyr to the cause of futurism,

Like so many in my academic clime,

My constant E-mail grew annoying,

Even threatened my employing,

And they punished me for wasting company time.

So from Arizona to Ohio did I travel

Searching out a professorial sinecure;

Where on the tenure track I'm staying

Without a need for there belaying

My career as cyber-pyrotechny's great poseur!

How I love my indisputable position

As the leader of the cyber-pyro gang –

Heed my strident safety warning,

Read my posts or you'll be mourning

That you dared try making anything go "bang."

Go to any trendy library or high school

And on the "Internet" you'll be allowed to romp;

There, learn schemes of futuristics,

Plied with government statistics,

Everything but eighth-grade English comp!

If you can talk to the cyber-geeks – learn their languages –

Once you have your God-almighty Ph.D.,

Though there's nought in your curricula

Pyrotechnic in particular

They'll blip and bleep

and slip and creep,

strange noises make,

and safety-fake,

and speak with awe and reverence of thee! ☞

— MERCURIO DOLCE

## ADDENDUM TO "THE USE OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES IN FIREWORKS"

Readers of Ernst Pfantodt's article in the February, 1996 issue of *The Case Former* may be interested to know that W.A. Hanbury, the nineteenth-century pyrotechnic amateur and author of extensive manuscript notes on pyrotechnic practices of various contemporary manufacturers, left a description of a "guncotton rocket." At one point there is a short reference that says:

He [Pain] makes 1/2 lb. (are they 1/2 lb.?) rockets with heads like an Asteroid head - of the same calibre as the exterior of the case, and fills them with gun cotton, and he said they gave as good a report as the Coehorn maroon with 13 oz. of powder. N.B. - a detonating tube is necessary for firing the cotton.

The "detonating tube" mentioned in the last sentence is, in today's parlance, a blasting cap. The American reader should be aware that the "1/2 lb." rocket referred to in the text is according to the British system whereby a rocket of 7/8" inside diameter is "1/2 lb." rather than "2 lb." The "Coehorn maroon with 13 oz. of powder" would have been a 4-2/5" aerial maroon using black powder as an explosive charge - these notes were written in the 1880's, before flash powder had come into use for explosive effects.

A lengthier piece elsewhere in the manuscripts is mostly a fairly tedious description of the casing itself, with minute details including the weight of

the casing parts, but alas not the weight of the charge. Significantly, the piece says:

The charge is compressed guncotton bought ready made up into cartridges with detonating tube without which they do not explode. Craig said these were the only rockets they prime on the clay, to give a good flash for the detonating tube. He said they give as good a report as the 4-1/2 inch maroon with 13 oz. (?) of powder - if they do anything of the kind they would be cheaper, easier to make, and safer than the maroon.

Hanbury's comment indicates that the celebrated firm of Pain's Fireworks endorsed, by its practice more than a century ago, Pfantodt's contention that "a properly-selected high explosive will... detonate only from the proper use of a blasting cap, and will be much less sensitive to shock, friction, or flame than are flash powders or any other pyrotechnic compositions."

— SCOPPIETTO DULCAMARA

## THE CHARLATAN'S CHANSON

(Tune: "Pat-a-cake baker's man")

Safety-fake, safety-fake, Confidence Man -  
Betray fellow pyros as fast as you can.  
You take 'em and shake 'em, and steal their Class  
"C" -

Saying, "I'll leave nothing for you, and take all for  
me!"

— GASSILASCA JAPE



## Can't Spell?

DO YOU MATH SKILLS ADD NEW MEANING TO THE TERM  
"LONG DIVISION"? ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE  
FOR WHO IT IS DIFFICULT TO PROPERLY USE ENGLISH?

Without these skills its hard to get a descent job or to simply cope with the shear volume of information in today's society. Pyros, join you're friends in other hobbies, when you go on the Internet don't look like an illiterate dolt. If you're elementary school let you down there is still hope, we have sold millions of our NerdPerfect programs to people just like you. Even more have been bought by local, state and federal agencies, making our firm one of the great success stories of the free enterprise system. Hardly anybody will be able to tell your work from that of a Harvard graduate! For more exiting details, please contact:

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 NEWS FROM THE *Grapevine* 

*The editorial staff of The Case-Former is pleased to introduce a new informative column to keep its readership informed of significant events and personalities in the pyrotechnic world. To paraphrase Sgt. Friday, only the names have been changed to protect (just barely) the not-so-innocent. Any resemblance between the characters here portrayed and real life is intentional. We join our author in mid-stream of consciousness...*

Farewell to our past P.G.I. President Blombo, who thought presiding over the P.G.I. was going to be as easy as blowing up squirrels. He misunderstood the qualifications – P.G.I. does not stand for Pudgy-Grown Ignoramus.

Flack and Dottie Screwes are at it again, screwing not each other, but foolish subscribers of A.F.N. (Ain't F\*%¢@n' News) with their not so new screw... Fireworks Video Magazine, which has been on the market for a few months now. How it's lasted as long as it has is beyond me. I previewed Vol. 10, and it is the most ridiculous piece of pyrotechnic information I have witnessed since the debate that took place involving that fat, bloated, k-rap juggling, beanie-wearing, fart-knocking, Krookshankee, during last year's P.G.I. convention. He was as pathetic as the hair growing out of his ears – the roots are conflicting with what's left of his brains. Speaking of witnesses, I witnessed Bonnie Krookshankee checking into a fat farm during my trip to the Winter Blast, last February. As of this writing I am pleased to announce she has lost 40 pounds... from her belly to her ass! No more discombobulated Chef Boy-ar-dee ravioli juice for her.

Back to F.V.N... who in his right mind wants to pay \$30.00 for a 106-minute video consisting of: 1) Charlatan Wheeze spewing a fountain of misinformation that pertains to absolutely nothing. Here is an example of a lib who just likes to hear himself talk. I could only watch it for a few minutes with my back to the T.V. Every time I see his face I feel like turning into the Hulk. He's wearing a Pyrock shirt no less! Here's a guy who would do anything for money. For example... he didn't know what to do with that tall doofy kid of his for the summer. Camp costs money. Charlatan can't spend money – he only steals it. So what does he do with Lurch? He rented him to the zoo to feed the giraffes. Then came the wife! It seems the zoo was low on baboons with hair weaves so he threw in the wife and brother-in-law as a matched pair for a few extra bucks. Now with all this free time left over, he sits in front of a video camera (anyone missing a camcorder from '91?) and rattles off several minutes non-

sense. \$30.00(!!!) annually for this? As an added bonus... the Screwes, Flack and Dottie, sit dumb-founded sharing news taking up time by showing you pictures of calendars and cartoons from newspapers which you can't really make out due to the small graphics. Flack... if you really want to earn some money, try to get your wife to model Halloween masks. Back to the Wheeze: now, I'm a Catholic and was always taught that God does things for a reason... for the life of me, I can't figure out why He gave this rat a larynx!

Three cheers for the N.F.A. and their pursuit of a lawsuit challenging the C.P.S.C. (C\*\*ks\*\*\*\*\*g Pieces of S\*\*t). I.O.O.J. is behind you 100% A.T.F. (Accusation, Treachery, Fabrication) and D.O.T. (Dicks Out There) are next, we hope!

Here's Mr. Screwes again, showing us what it's like to dissect Class "C" fireworks. This is something I started doing when I learned how to walk. That's another 15 minutes shot to Hell. Between the two main contributors to A.F.N. and F.V.N., namely Charlatan Wheeze, a man lower than flea s\*\*t, and Kon Krookshankee, who has not only the appearance but the manner (egad! fap!) of Major Hoople, I can't see anyone wasting another cent on any of these publications. To see a grown man looking like an anorexic Santa Claus dissecting Silvery Swallows with a pen knife and surgical gloves like Dr. I.B. Gross is not my idea of an informative publication. I was more fascinated by the part in his wife's hair. Shows you just what could happen when you approach a bloated baby elephant and pull his tail with your head turned. Now there's a demo I would pay to see!

Orca the Killer Whale: remember him and his "stupor front" in N.Y.? I'm still trying to figure out what he was fronting for. Well, after charming everyone with his incredible humor and dialogue when presenting his "front" which looked better than his back, our buddy Orca was arrested for shoplifting at a local supermarket in upstate New York. The charges were dropped when police removed his shirt. It seems the store manager assumed he was smuggling a small turkey out of the store under his shirt behind his right shoulder. It turns out not only did the store manager have a hunch – so did Orca! Now, after being examined by the authorities he was released in his own custody. In parting it was suggested that he grow another one on his left side and become a professional caddy... This just in... U.F.O. III was recently spotted at a Southern California airport. His head was shaved completely and he was wearing a white shower curtain banging a tambourine and selling flowers while chanting "Honashee! Honashee!" Good luck Fuzzy!

B.B., head of safety, was being sought for questioning regarding a recent appearance at the P.G.I. banquet. It seems that MCA Records is accusing him of impersonating rock star Tom Petty. When representatives of MCA came to question him at his

ranch, they found themselves facing three huge Great Danes the size of Clydesdales and an uncovered minefield of dog s\*\*t. They decided it was a matter best left alone.

The Viking Prince himself came up small in the election for 2nd V.P. Not discouraged, he is currently teaching himself how to walk on fire like the Moroccans do. His last attempt in Michigan was successful to some extent. The partner he ushered out with him came out of it with melted sneakers. The Prince is convinced it's mind over matter. What his comrade with goocy rubber soles didn't comprehend was that this works when the "matter" does not consist of 80-proof goo-goo juice.

For sale: One "Brother Fredo" roommate kit. Consists of 1 oxygen mask with tank; 1 case of Glade room freshener; 4 clothespins; 1 week of Allstate health insurance; 7 corks; 5 parakeets with cage; 1 pair of goggles; 1 gas mask; wallpaper paste and grout; and 1 asbestos exhaust hose with girdle. For more info call: Frankie Spanky, c/o Mt. Sinai Hospital, Recovery Room 1803. Phone 1-800-HE-STUNK.

I've been told that Mr. Wheeze met his wife while working with the Peace Corps. Back in '82, the two of them met when he was visiting a gorilla farm in southeastern Brazil. She was the head banana shucker. She had spent 19 years on the farm and developed an uncanny resemblance to the young charges she wet-nursed. Mr. Wheeze took a liking to her due to the similarities of his childhood.

Kon Krookshantee goes muff diving! On the morning of July 19th, 1996, I was seated in the host hotel restaurant in Weedsport. As I sat staring at the low-grade dog food I was served, I noticed two large shadows sweeping across my table. It was the Krook and an unidentified person. The unknown barrel model asked the Krook if he was interested in joining him for breakfast. The Krook replied, "No, I just had a little something." When asked exactly what it was that satisfied his incredible appetite, the Krook responded proudly, "Wilted cheese and parsley!"

I.O.O.J. welcomes two new members this year. There would have been three but Sleeping Beauty was not to be disturbed. Joe McDonald and Frankie Cuch were the only two candidates at this year's convention. The induction was completed with granola bars, as powdered sugar doughnuts were unavailable at the time.

That's all for now... till next time... ☘

—MIGALUCC

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## NITROGENIUS

Gene was a weird but great guy. I only knew him from the seventh to eleventh grades, but he helped make them exciting times. The son of a blacksmith and blaster, Gene had access to strong

acids, and alkalis, unusual metals, caps, and the explosives the rest of us so desperately craved. Gene's knowledge of what could be done with acetylene was legendary. But it was his work with high-order explosives that endeared him to us budding pyros, explosive wannabes, and sick-minded, devious vandals.

We had already done a lot of good, solid work with commercial fireworks, commonly-available chemicals, and various sporting powders. Our flagship devices were five-shot repeating bombs nailed to boards and equipped with nitrated-cotton time fuses. When batteries of these artifices were directed toward the door of the police station, they made for exciting nights filled with reports, smoke, sirens and people running through alleys and backyards. When we blew out the glass windows in parking meters with cherry bombs, the results usually included comical, Keystone-cop gatherings during daylight investigations and inquiries, and an occasional bonus article in the newspaper. When, on hot summer nights, we placed strong paper tubes with charges of black powder behind a quarter-pound of graphited grease on the sills of open bedroom windows, the splattering across the bed and against the far wall made for some hilarious window-peeping, especially after the smoke cleared.

Gene did not help us with these worthwhile activities. Fortunately, he worked in an equally productive area as far as our terroristic endeavors were concerned. He nitrated everything except dynamite and also had access to that wonderful stuff.

Was Gene a genius? I believe so, because who else could successfully produce primary explosives in the seventh grade? Knowledgeable explosives chemists will probably know exactly what Gene made. He told me once, but I cannot remember. I think it was "tetra" something. Whatever, he had this vicious compound in the form of tiny pieces of paper that he kept moist in a small vial. When dry, these would explode with the slightest contact with any oily compound. Gene recognized that such conditions could quickly be achieved by the drying action of clothing combined with the force of somebody's rump as it pressed into the walnut-oil-soaked seat of a school desk. Gene's intuitiveness was rewarded early one afternoon in Mr. Anderson's biology class. Three clearly audible "snaps" and three little clouds of smoke totally disrupted the class and made one little girl wail about the tiny hole in her dress.

One day we were crow hunting and a farm dog chased our car for a half mile, ruining our chances to set up on a nice group of birds in the nearby woods. That did it for Gene. The next weekend he took care of that problem with one of his infamous "hot dog surprises." These were sticks of 40% ditching with bacon tightly wrapped around them with soft machinists' wire. A big advantage of this method for the dog's owner was the shal-

low, ready-made grave that often formed in the road ditch near what remained of the carcass. Fearless, Gene once took a cat off the porch of one farmhouse with his .30-40 Krag.

Gene could make a dull winter day come alive. One time around Christmas we were driving on a frozen lake, making donuts on the ice and seeing how many times we could make the car spin. We were heading toward a group of about 15 fish houses when the idea hit Gene. "Go slow across that opening between the houses," said Gene as he capped and fused a stick. "No need to gun it." We drove off the lake to watch the explosion from nearly a mile away.

The nearest house was nearly 100 feet away from ground zero, but all houses were similarly affected. Steam and fishermen soaked with water, coffee, and alcoholic beverages erupted almost simultaneously from the houses. We suspected that the abruptly-rising water columns extinguished only a few of the fires in the stoves, because the occupants of the houses quickly went back inside to escape the 20-below-zero cold. Others ran shivering to start their cars and trucks. We often marveled at the resiliency of thick ice, and how the shock wave could push water with such pressure up through the fishermen's cork-sucking iceholes. Credit Gene with one of his finest stunts ever!

But all this fun would soon end, as graduation was near and interest in females, college, jobs, and the military began taking its toll. I can only pray that our youth will continue to have the opportunity to spring harmless pranks and lightly vandalize society by learning to be creative with low- and high-order explosives and commonly-available chemicals. Only then can they claim to be members of a free citizenry.

— HORST KNALLKÖRPER

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## WHAT IS A "FIREWORKS EXPERT"? — AN HISTORICAL VIEW

*Cedat fortuna peritis.*

—MOTTO OF THE U.S. FIELD ARTILLERY

*C'est par Amour que les arts se parfont  
Que les vaillans et les sçauans se font.*

—J.-A. DE BAÏF

Over the past few years our small and close-knit field of pyrotechny has been riven by debate over the issue of "expert witnesses" in lawsuits involving fireworks businesses, notably in petition drives to expel members from the American Pyrotechnics Association in 1993, and in 1994-5 from the Pyrotechnics Guild International. The merits of the specific cases in which the members in question

were involved have been vigorously argued, as have the benefits, faults, and ethical dilemmas arising in general from the hiring of "expert witnesses" by parties to litigation. It is not our purpose to touch on these here. Rather, we think it may be of interest to ask just what is a "fireworks expert," whether as a witness or otherwise; what makes someone an expert of this kind, and how may we identify him as such?

The "expert credentials" offered by one the persons involved in these recent controversies consist of a Ph.D. in a field called "nuclear chemistry" – whatever that is, it is remote from pyrotechnic chemistry – and a history of unsuccessful dabbling in several lines of fireworks business. The other individual's academic credentials are even slighter, and his experience has been as a part-time display operator and salesman of second-hand plastic mortars. We have long been suspicious of academic credentials in chemistry as a background for fireworks, because several persons well-educated in chemistry have uniformly told us their academic experience included little or nothing that acquainted them with pyrotechnic phenomena. Nonetheless, one friend of ours, who was not present at the 1994 or 1995 P.G.I. conventions, and who is not an A.P.A. member, was quick to attribute the actions of those bodies to "anti-intellectual" attitudes. We were reminded by this of how the news reader Peter Jennings (a Canadian) chided the American people, on election night in 1994, for having a "temper tantrum" in electing Republican majorities in Congress, when clearly Mr. Jennings felt we were rejecting, in the Democrats, what was "best for us," as an infant rejects bitter medicine.

Clearly, the problem is deeper than these superficial explanations. The possession of academic credentials alone is no guarantee of deep learning or expertise. Granted, a Ph.D. in chemistry, or any other discipline, is a measure of *some* accomplishment – even if from an undistinguished land-grant college. But that accomplishment may be mere *sitzfleisch*, with which, if the subject in reference has always possessed the same well-upholstered physiognomy he now has, he is evidently abundantly endued. Rejections of claims to expertise by such a person, in a specialized and recondite field like pyrotechny, may be well-founded. Any reasonably independent and observant person knows that the American university has been a sink of intellectual dishonesty, time-serving, plagiarism, and political correctness for decades.

To be sure, these have been greater problems in the liberal arts and social sciences (what a brilliant mathematician of our acquaintance once called "bullshit disciplines"), but they have begun to affect the more rigorous scientific fields as well. Thus we have, for example, a study attributing I.Q. deficits in children to high levels of lead in the blood – setting off public hysteria about the use of lead in gaso-

line, paint, and other common products – when in fact the children with high lead levels were mainly poor urban blacks, whilst those with low lead levels were middle-class suburban whites, and the study ignored the numerous social and economic factors that might equally well have accounted for I.Q. differences! More ominously, there is the case of the prominent Harvard scientist who strenuously maintained, right up to the fall of Soviet communism, that the infamous “yellow rain” dropped on Afghan villages by invading Soviet forces was nothing more than bee feces.

Less flagrantly than these politicized examples, but even more significantly, the tremendous prestige in the concept of “science” conceals the banality and mediocrity of so much passing by that name. Thus, observations on shell drift, or printing corrugated boxes, or sanitary sewage disposal, are dressed up in the trappings of scientific formality, as if on a par with, say, Leonhard Euler on celestial mechanics. It is much the same as how people in servile or insignificant positions are often dressed in clothes that resemble those their social betters wore 50 or 100 years previously. The fancy restaurant still puts its waiters in tailcoats even though none of its customers have dressed for dinner in this fashion for decades. No perceptive person would be confused about the standing of a waiter by his archaic upper-class dress. Similarly, we should recognize that anyone who writes that a “convection” (*sic*) is something that takes place in court, even if he has a Ph.D. in nuclear chemistry, is wearing the academic equivalent of a tux that is out at the elbows and shiny in the seat.

Pyrotechny is, in any event, not a science, but a skilled craft. In the hands of an exceptional workman, it may attain the status of an art form. The chemistry involved, to the extent it is, is an applied chemistry – in the Comte de Chaptal’s felicitous phrase, “la chimie appliqué aux arts.” Vast and important areas of chemical knowledge are either mostly irrelevant (e.g. organic chemistry) or only remotely applicable and not essential to a practical command of pyrotechny (e.g. physical chemistry). Michelangelo did not need to know the molecular structure of his pigments in order to paint the Sistine ceiling; nor would all the knowledge of a paint chemist have enabled him to paint it. So it is with the pyrotechnist, who has as his canvas the “starry-deck’d canopy of heaven.”

When seeking benchmarks of pyrotechnic expertise, it is illuminating to examine the backgrounds of various authors of pyrotechnic books over the ages. We have prepared a table of some notable pyrotechnic authors and their backgrounds to see what, if any, common factors might emerge that portray their characteristics.

Military rank is the most common feature, with a surprising 15 out of 34 – and note that authors of books devoted solely to military pyrotechny have

been excluded! If military affiliation (but not actual military rank) is counted, four more (Cutbush, Faber, Davis, and Ellern) are included, making 19, or 56%. Holders of doctoral degrees numbered only seven, or 21% – of whom five (Meyer, Davis, Izzo, Ellern, and Shimizu) also had military rank or affiliation.

Ron Lancaster has somewhere remarked that some people seem to regard the interest of a clergyman in fireworks as odd, but he is, in this survey, one of three such pyrotechnic authors (and the other two are distinguished antecedents). As a schoolmaster he also has a noteworthy predecessor in Thomas Kentish.

Practising pyrotechnists (defined for these purposes as persons making significant portions of their livings from the manufacture of fireworks) are not abundant on the list, numbering only seven; if persons connected with the trade, e.g. Browne (a consultant chemist) and Lamarre (a chemical dealer) are added, nine. This is not particularly surprising since persons making their livings at fireworks have little reason to disclose the mysteries of their art.

The connection of military service with pyrotechnics is more understandable amongst the earlier writers, in whose day there was less difference between military and civilian fireworks, and when artillerymen in the service of the state were called upon to provide displays for public rejoicing after the wars had been won. Still, it is significant that many of their books are devoted *solely* to fireworks for pleasure. Special note should be made of Chertier and Shimizu – in many respects authors of similar importance and character – whose interest in pyrotechny for pleasure followed long after military service. Another pair of authors due some attention are Josef von Uchatius, an Austrian general whose other inventions included an early moving-picture machine, and Amédée Denisse, inventor of the first rocket-borne camera. They both seem to have possessed that polymathic inventiveness so typical of the century that produced Edison.

Allowing for the overlap between categories, what do our examinations of these pyrotechnic experts’ backgrounds tell us, if anything? We think that the picture is too nebulous to show much, other than that possession of an academic degree is *not* a good predictor of expertise as a pyrotechnist!

What, then, is the defining character of the fireworks expert – that *rara avis*, before whom fortune always yields? Our conclusion is simple and probably unscientific, but founded on a lifetime of experience. One of our favorite contemporary philosophers, Jeff Cooper, once wrote that no one ever excels at an activity he does not love. There may be those who endure, in activities they do not enjoy, and attain some competence or skill; but they will never match those who are motivated by devotion, rather than by mere material gain or desire for recognition. Marsilio Ficino, in the midst

of that great burst of artistic creativity we know as the Italian renaissance, wrote that "Love is the Teacher and Ruler of the Arts." Similarly, the Abbé Hugonin, in his commentaries on Hugh of St. Victor, said that "Intelligence marches towards the conquest of truth, and love reposes in its enjoyment; it is the triumph after combat, peace after war. Intelligence commences the work, but love crowns it."

Pyrotechny, and, we suspect, no comparable art, ever rewards its votaries with wealth commensurate to their efforts. There have, indeed, been those who have done well financially, but one suspects these people would have done as well or better in another field, had they pursued it with equal ardor. Accomplishing the work well is, for them, the principal gratification; prosperity and reputation may follow, but only as by-products.

And it is in this simple enjoyment of one's own ability that we may know the master of his craft to be such – that facile performance of the diffi-

cult, with that *sprezzatura* or nonchalance that conceals all art, and makes whatever is done appear to be without effort or thought, as easy as rolling off a log. It is this we see in the performance of an Isaac Stern in the concert hall, or of a Jack Nicklaus on the golf course, or in any small village in Malta on the patronal feast. Indeed, to detect such expertise calls for some discernment on the part of the observer, because the real master feels no need to proclaim himself as such or to brandish credentials. His work speaks for itself.

On the other hand, we have often wondered whether many of the self-proclaimed experts we see even *like* pyrotechny, much less have the love for it needed to be real craftsmen. What they proceed from is vainglory, that is, love of themselves and love of money. Sad as it is for the people they hurt, it is sadder still for themselves – for what, in the end, will they have to look back upon but wasted lives spent "striving after wind"? ¶

— ERNST PFANTODT

## SOME NOTABLE PYROTECHNIC AUTHIORS AND THEIR BACKGROUNDS

| Author                                     | Book Title                                                                                                                       | Date Published             | Author's Background                                               |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Roger Bacon                                | <i>Opus majus; Opus tertium; Epistola de secretis operibus artis et naturæ, et de nullitate magiæ</i> (description of gunpowder) | Mid-13th century           | Franciscan friar; Oxford don                                      |
| Albert von Bollstadt (St. Albertus Magnus) | <i>De mirabilibus mundi</i> (gunpowder and fireworks recipes)                                                                    | Third quarter 13th century | Bishop of Ratisbon; canonized 1930. Mentor of St. Thomas Aquinas. |
| Vannoccio Biringuccio                      | <i>De la pirotechnia</i>                                                                                                         | 1540                       | Artillerist to the City of Siena and to the Holy See              |
| Joseph Furttenbach                         | <i>Halinitro-Pyrobolia</i>                                                                                                       | 1627                       | Artillerist to various German princes                             |
| François de Malthe                         | <i>Traité des feux artificielz</i>                                                                                               | 1629                       | Artillerist (France)                                              |
| Jean Appier (Hanzelet Lorrain)             | <i>La pyrotechnie</i>                                                                                                            | 1630                       | Printer and engraver                                              |
| John Bate                                  | <i>The Mysteries of Nature and Art</i>                                                                                           | 1634                       | Gunner                                                            |
| John Babington                             | <i>Pyrotechnia</i>                                                                                                               | 1635                       | Gunner                                                            |
| Casimir Simienowicz                        | <i>Ars magnæ artilleriæ</i>                                                                                                      | 1650                       | Lieutenant-General of Ordnance to the King of Poland              |
| A.-F. de Frézier                           | <i>Traité des feux d'artifice</i>                                                                                                | 1706                       | Military engineer                                                 |
| J.-C. Perrinet-d'Orval                     | <i>Essay sur les feux d'artifice</i>                                                                                             | 1745                       | Military engineer                                                 |
| Robert Jones                               | <i>Artificial Fireworks</i>                                                                                                      | 1765                       | Lieutenant (later Captain), R.A.                                  |
| C.-F. Ruggieri                             | <i>Elémens de pyrotechnie</i>                                                                                                    | 1801                       | Practising pyrotechnist                                           |
| L.-E. Audot                                | <i>L'art de faire à peu de frais les feux d'artifice</i>                                                                         | 1818                       | Publisher and bookseller                                          |

# SOME NOTABLE PYROTECHNIC AUTHORS AND THEIR BACKGROUNDS CONT.

| Author              | Book Title                                           | Date Published | Author's Background                                                                                       |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| James Cutbush       | <i>A System of Pyrotechny</i>                        | 1825           | Professor, U.S. Military Academy, West Point                                                              |
| Moritz Meyer        | <i>Lehrbuch der pyrotechnik</i>                      | 1840           | Captain, Prussian army; held doctoral degree                                                              |
| F.-M. Chertier      | <i>Nouvelles recherches sur les feux d'artifice</i>  | 1843           | French artillery officer                                                                                  |
| Martin Websky       | <i>Lustfeuerwerkkunst</i>                            | 1846           | Professor; doctor                                                                                         |
| Josef von Uchatius  | <i>Die Kunst-Feuerwerkerei zu Lande</i>              | 1848           | Austrian general; inventor of electrical firing                                                           |
| A.-D. Vergnaud      | <i>Nouveau manuel complet de l'artificier</i>        | 1865           | General, French army                                                                                      |
| Thomas Kentish      | <i>The Pyrotechnist's Treasury</i>                   | 1878           | Schoolmaster                                                                                              |
| A. Lamarre          | <i>Nouveau manuel de l'artificier</i>                | 1878           | Chemical dealer to the fireworks trade                                                                    |
| W.H. Browne         | <i>The Art of Pyrotechny</i>                         | 1880           | Chemist; consultant to the fireworks trade; held doctoral degree                                          |
| Amédée Denisse      | <i>Traite pratique complet des feux d'artifice</i>   | 1882           | Commercial artist; photographer (made first photograph from rocket-mounted camera)                        |
| Paul Tessier        | <i>Chimie pyrotechnique</i>                          | 1883           | Chemist                                                                                                   |
| Donenico Antoni     | <i>Trattato teorico-pratico di pirotecnia civile</i> | 1893           | Practising pyrotechnist                                                                                   |
| Henry B. Faber      | <i>Military Pyrotechnics</i>                         | 1919           | Dean, Pyrotechnic schools, U.S. Army Ordnance; patentee of civilian pyrotechnic items                     |
| Tenney L. Davis     | <i>The Chemistry of Powder and Explosives</i>        | 1941           | Professor of Chemistry, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; technical director, National Fireworks Co. |
| George W. Weingart  | <i>Pyrotechnics</i>                                  | 1947           | Practising pyrotechnist; businessman                                                                      |
| Alan St. Hill Brock | <i>A History of Fireworks</i>                        | 1949           | Practising pyrotechnist                                                                                   |
| Attilio Izzo        | <i>Pirotecnia e fuochi artificiali</i>               | 1950           | Colonel, Italian army; held doctoral degree                                                               |
| Herbert Ellern      | <i>Military and Civilian Pyrotechnics</i>            | 1967           | Pyrotechnic chemist, Diamond Match Co.; held doctoral degree                                              |
| Ronald Lancaster    | <i>Fireworks Principles and Practice</i>             | 1972           | Anglican priest; school headmaster; practising pyrotechnist                                               |
| Takeo Shimizu       | <i>Fireworks: The Art, Science and Technique</i>     | 1981           | Colonel, Japanese army ordnance; later earned doctoral degree; practising pyrotechnist                    |

NOTE: No attempt has been made to list every work by each author, nor every publication date of works that may have been published in multiple editions. The date listed, in most cases, is that of the first publication or of the most common edition of the author's best-known work.



# Lyra Pyroburlesca

*Big bombs, small bombs, great guns and little ones!  
Put him in a pillory!  
Rack him with artillery!*

— W.S. GILBERT, *The Grand Duke*

## MY FRIEND THE DOCTOR

(From *The Mis-Adventures of Dr. Do-lattle*)

*A tune without a key, in the tonus peregrinus, to be sung  
by a chorus of adoring, wide-eyed little children.*

### I.

My friend the Doctor says, for kids to learn of  
fireworks  
They ought to buy the newest pyro book,  
And try the "internet" of course, because with any  
older source,  
There is an awful danger that they might get took.

My friend the Doctor says, amateurs need licenses,  
Tourbillions need their twisted wings to fly;  
Kurt Saxon's work he really wrecked, he's quite  
politically correct,  
Except for shooting plastic litter... into the sky.

REFRAIN: Ma - a - aybe what the Doctor tells me  
Isn't altogether true,  
But he's a grownup and an expert -  
People like him are the reason my school  
bought... computers too!

### II.

My friend the doctor says that copper in a  
chlorate mix  
Will cause a fearsome blast within the hour;  
His other scary tales enthrall, statistics there are  
none at all;  
Obviously he needs some more... computing power.

My friend the doctor states that nasty merc'ry  
sublimates  
Really gave the old-time workers hell -  
He thinks he has the inside scoop, but really he's  
so full of poop,  
Maybe he needs a dose of good old... calomel.

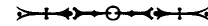
### III.

My friend the doctor thinks that trendy new  
computer links  
Are necessary academic tools;  
Brilliant chemists of this kind are bound to shape  
my little mind,  
And probably help some politicians... make new  
rules.

So many fools are keen to help reform the  
firework scene  
That only one thing seems a certainteeeee:  
The world would be a better place if they stayed  
lost in cyberspace

With my friend - the Doctor - and me!

— S. DULCAMARA



## PROFESSOR "K"

(To the tune: "Yesterday")

Professor "K"  
a witless expert that will lie for pay;  
he wouldn't know if it was night or day -  
Oh I detest professor "K".

Cold in hell  
would be the day that he could build a shell;  
but how to do it he will gladly tell -  
Oh, are those elephants I smell?

How, he, goes through life like a rat, I'll never know  
One, can, only hope for the plague in Col-o-rad-  
do-o-o-o.

The expert,  
clad in tennis shoes and bowling shirts,  
makes me want to take a nap in dirt -  
Oh, rid me of this pompous twerp.

J-O-P  
what a giant waste of ink and tree  
useless studies of no use to me  
can you spell relevancy?

What became,  
of the krap for which you're famed;  
those shells were guaranteed to maim -  
You really ought to be ashamed.

"K", has, failed so much, it's become his stock in  
trade

Now, he's figured out that his lies can get him paid-  
aid-aid-aid.

Doctor "K"  
would you like to go the Big Bruce way?  
Put on the feed bag and go on display -  
just get the hell out of the way!

— SAUL MCCARTNEY

# A BALLADE OF THE PML

The Net py-ro - tech - ny does not com - ple - ment; The leaders it e - le-vates in -

com - pe - tent. From a bank - ruptured *Hymen* to *Boo - dab* it fell; and thence

to *Crank Meas - ley*, sad - history doth tell; there, cow - college chem profs their

theories explain with such lack of ex - per - ience, 'twill drive you in - sane.

## A BALLADE OF THE PML

(Air: "If love's a sweet passion," *The Beggar's Opera*)

The Net pyrotechny  
Does not complement;  
The leaders it ele-  
Vates, incompetent.

From a bank-ruptured  
*Hymen*, to *Boodab* it fell;  
And thence to *Crank Measley*,  
Sad history doth tell.

There, cow-college chem profs  
Their theories explain,  
With such lack of experience,  
'Twill drive you insane.

"No chlorate of potash  
Paris green, or red lead -  
Touch even one grain, and  
You'll surely drop dead."

Any actual Bombs, you'll  
Wait ages in vain  
To see from *Crank Measley*,  
*Tom Dimwit*, *Murrain*.

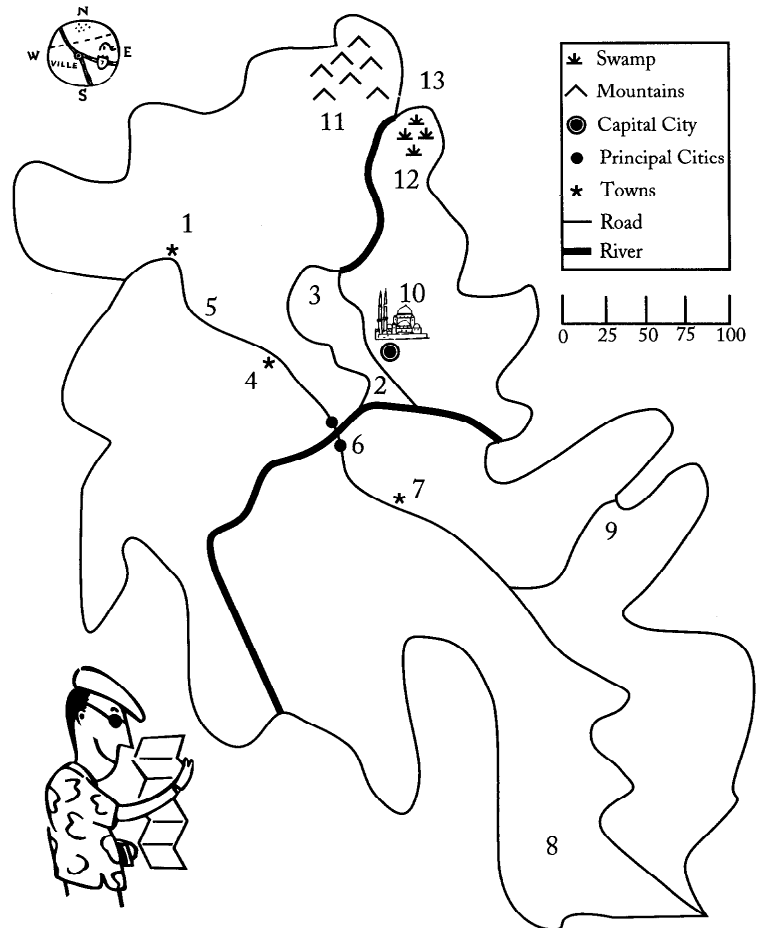
The bombs of *Fugisti*  
Stir the Soul, lift the Heart;  
But the Rant of a Net-Wit  
Isn't worth a squelch'd Fart!



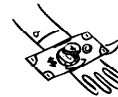
# The People's Republic of Wheezanistan

## POINTS OF INTEREST

1. *Rauchmantl* — site of the celebrated University, with its noted departments of Safety-Fakery, Prevarication, and Embezzlement. The Law School is well-known for its specialization in Barratry and Champerty. College architecture is of the Schlamperei-Dreck period.
2. *Bermuda Trialangle* — Shifting currents make this a spot to avoid at all costs.
3. *Lake Jiggery* — The fishing's great at Quisling Quay.
4. *Informant Information Bureau* — a must stop along the
5. *Benedict Arnold Memorial Highway* — with scenic Pander Pass, Moot Point, and Truth Bend.
6. *Jiggery-Pokery* — The Twin Cities of the Republic. Population three. Relish the exquisitely bland cuisine at the Farts and Sausages Diner (infrequently open).
7. *R.A.P. Shell gas station* — Fill your tank here — the stuff doesn't burn well, but it will probably get you out of the Republic, which is a must.
8. *Charlatan Badlands* — A stark, barren wasteland, buffeted by incessant wind, it makes the moon look like Yellowstone. Admission W400.00 + 15% tax. #110 B&W film sold for W200.00/roll + tax.\*
9. *Wheezanistan National Forest* — A few sickly saplings of unknown species that produce a peculiar whine as the wind blows through them. Many of the original trees were burned down in a KRAP shell accident and have been supplemented by tasteful imitations made possible by modern injection moulding technology. A fascinating biological study. Admission W400.00 + 15% tax. #110 B&W film sold for W200.00/roll + tax.\*
10. *Double Crosse* — Capital of Wheezanistan, situated on picturesque Desperate Straits. Site of "Thunder-farce '9?". Tourist attractions include many low taverns.
11. *The Heights of Arrogance* — Almost impassable due to incessant winds (cf. #9 above) and the always-un-sound footing. These desolate outcroppings sit atop a soft and always shifting bedrock, marked by numerous sinkholes and fault lines. It is separated by the River of Other People's Tears from
12. *The Slough of DeCeit* — a morass from which thick miasmata constantly issue. Flora and fauna unique to this area include the Flagrant Insolentia (national flower of Wheezanistan); several species of snake, all poisonous, most notably the Back-Biting Puff Adder; birds including the Yellow-Striped Sycophant, the Cheeky Bustard and the Bloated Shitepoke; numerous leeches, toads, stoats, and bloodsucking insects.



13. *Rising Gorge* — Scenic exit by water from the Republic. Ferry service to Anticyra daily, across the Bight of Taxes, via Acheron Packetboat Co. Steamer, *PMS Mal-de-mer*.



\* NOTE: The currency of this country, the *wheelzel*, is highly inflated. Divided nominally into 100 *cheets* of 4 brass *fart(h)ings* apiece, the official rate is W1 = U.S. \$4.80 (black market W1 = 1/10¢ U.S.). Subsidiary coinage has not been minted in many years, as the only brass in the country is that possessed by the Head Charlatan.

International service to the Double Crosse airport is provided by Fly-by-Night Airways; the capital's principal accommodation, the Hotel Sordide, is rated "five emesis pans" by Michelin. Free bottle of pargoric on check-in. To arrange a trip today call



WHEEZANISTAN INTOURIST

1-800-GET-TOOK

(A division of Charlatan Wheeze Enterprises)

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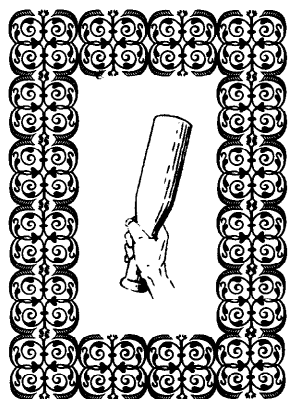
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The Society For the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny.



# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et prævalebit.” – I. *Esdras*, iiij: 41.

VOL. IV

AUGUST, 1997

NO. 1

## THE YELLOW PERIL

“How come?” asked Leo, “It’s the best yellow dye we got.”

“Supposed to be too dangerous. Damn near as bad as TNT, extremely toxic, and inhalable,” said the Assistant Director.

“OK, I’ll take care of it.” Click.

Leo, a World War II vet who had shot a lot of TNT and had been shot at by a lot of weapons ranging from 8 to 88 mm, did not hear the Assistant Director start to say that the Chemist would come out and take charge. Instead, Leo walked over to the cabinet, took the little brown bottle of picric acid, dumped the remaining 41 grams slowly into the toilet, and flushed the crystals into the septic tank. His thoughts flew back to the early 50’s when he and some other young refuge biologists had trapped and dyed the plump drake canvasbacks on their communal “headquarters ponds” on the Saskatchewan breeding grounds, and then followed and recorded the movements of the yellow-backed birds for science. He had used it by the kilogram, but that was decades ago. He even dimly recalled buying small bottles of the acid at the local drugstore when he and the other 6th graders sprinkled it on their combs to dye their hair as a school prank.

“H-h-h-he w-w-w-what?” said Ken the Chemist, trembling as he fondled a copy of the recent Emergency Safety Order (EMS) that had been entrusted to him by the Assistant Director. The EMS outlined with terrible forebodings all the horrible properties of picric acid. “My God, he could easily have been killed! Now I have to try and decontaminate the place.”

“Do your best,” said the Assistant Director, his voice suitably grave.

“Yes sir. By the way, I changed the locks on the chemistry laboratory again. Did you know the terrorists have orders to steal any chemical that can be potentially useful to their cause?”

“No, but you could be right,” said the Assistant Director, rolling his eyes and already enjoying the thought of telling the Director about the latest terrorist plot that threatened the Federal Service out in

this remote section of Wyoming.

“Evacuate the laboratory,” said the Chemist. “Leo, I want you to put on this smoke mask and face shield and this bunker gear that I got on loan from the Fire Department. Put your back to the toilet and flush it 50 times.”

“Fuck you,” laughed Leo, his eyes twinkling in mirth. “The dye is gone, you dumb shit. You want me to dig open the septic tank so you can snorkel for any undissolved crystals? I’ve got some fusees in my truck that you can use to light up the bottom.”

Sensing a lack of cooperation and blatant disregard for the strict protocols used to handle Class AAA Schedule 3.7.9.2 hyperexplosive compounds, the Chemist had to settle for five minutes by himself in the toilet with a leaky garden hose. But he took pleasure in the fact that he could now report that his concern for the safety of his fellow workers had forced him to tackle the ticklish job singlehandedly.

The next day was even worse. Another 14 grams of the deadly stuff had been found in a small metal tin in another building. But this time the Chemist’s worst fears were realized... container corrosion! He carefully approached the container again, making sure he did not touch it. Yes, there it was, a telltale rust spot near the lid. The Chemist immediately locked the door of the building and flagged it all around with police tape. A quick phone call to the Assistant Director started the process. The AD immediately called the Director, explained the fearsome situation and got approval. He called the State Bomb Squad.

The heavy truck rolled out of the outskirts of the State Capitol. Fred, Leader of the Bomb Disposal Unit, and Charlie, the Assistant Unit Leader, had never dealt with picric acid before. In fact, this was only their third call to duty. The first had been out in the oil fields, where a rancher had found what remained of the wrapper of a quarter pound of RDX after the prairie dogs had chewed it up. The small charge had been rendered useless five years ago by the wheels of a seismic crew truck. The other incident was the disposal of five 2-inch firecrackers that had been found in the glove compartment of a car full of teenagers last Fourth of July. But, after talk-

ing with the Chemist, Fred and Charlie were apprehensive.

"Got it!" said Fred as he spoke in hushed tones into his specially grounded lapel microphone that relayed the message to Charlie outside the building and also recorded it for later analysis by the Bomb Research Division. Despite the clumsy gloves, Fred manipulated the remotely-controlled tongs and set the deadly canister into the steel mesh bag on the radio-controlled cart.

"Ready with Sandy?" "Yup." said Charlie, standing alongside the 5-ton bomb container with walls of sand that would receive the canister and its sinister contents.

Everything worked with precision. Fred drove the cart out to the truck, then used the special tongs to pick up the canister and deftly set it on the bottom of Sandy. Charlie peered through the bullet-proof window of the truck as he manipulated the controls and gently lowered the ponderous lid and closed Sandy for the trip ahead. The Chemist got on the phone and told Maintenance that the coast was clear and they could tear down the police tape and tell the employees to go back to work.

"Now what shall we do with it?" said Fred.

"Best to not let it leave Federal property," said the Chemist. "Liability in case of an accident."

"Then let's do it in the pit at the dumpground." said Charlie.

"Great idea, Charlie, but what about the media?" said the Assistant Director. "This is certainly worth a story."

"Yeah, give them a call." said the Director.

"You got State Radio on the line, Charlie?"

"Yup."

Because of the heavy bomb suit and lead boots, Fred almost fell over the piles of slightly used typewriters, computers, microscopes, and other laboratory equipment that lay at the bottom of the pit awaiting burial.

He gingerly placed the canister on the back of an old Hasselblad camera that lay lens down in the mud at the bottom of the pit.

"OK, place the charge." said Fred. Now it was Charlie's turn. He carefully placed the capped, one-ounce charge of TNT next to the little can and delicately poured sand over both items. Then, ever so gently, he ran the 10-ft. length of dynamite fuse up to the top of the pit where Fred weighted the end down with a rock.

"Fire in the hole!" cried Fred as he pulled the ignitor ring and the bickford fuse bubbled to life.

What seemed like hours was only 51 minutes to the Unit crew, the Chemist, the Assistant Director, the reporter, and his crew from KSMA-TV, as they watched from the top of a hill about 600 yards away from ground zero. With a SPLUT sound the charge detonated and the TV crew caught the top of the tiny puff of black smoke as it briefly rose from the

pit. Fred missed it with the 1000 mm lens on his armored Nikon, but the Assistant Director thought he might have got it with his handheld wide-angle.

"Wasn't very loud." said the Assistant Director.

"Hey, these guys know what they're doing." said the Chemist. "They had it perfect barricaded."

"Did you get all our names?" said the Director to the reporter.

On the long drive back to the Capitol, Fred said, "Always feels good to save lives, don't it Charlie?" "Yup," said Charlie, as he chest heaved with pride. KSMA aired the disposal project during a special feature called "The Environment... to Protect and Serve" that was picked up and played on some other stations, some out-of-state. Several stations saved the story and were able to tie it into their anti-fireworks material scheduled to be aired during the upcoming Fourth of July.

The Chemist appreciated the \$500 Special Achievement Award he received for his herculean efforts, but absolutely cherished the framed Certificate of Special Achievement that now hung above his desk. His chances for promotion or lateral transfer to a position of higher authority were now greatly enhanced.

The Director and Assistant Director chortled over the incident and the good publicity.

"Sure it cost \$17,457, but it was worth every penny," said the Director. "Really put us on the map."

"Damn right," said the Assistant Director. "No trouble justifying our new budget request now!"

— HORST KNALLKÖRPER

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## WHEN WE WERE SMALL AND FIRECRACKERS WERE BIG

We came to Los Angeles from New York in September 1945, right at the end of World War II. We were downtown, staying at the Alexandria Hotel while my Father was checking out homes. All the while this footloose 8-year old was busy wandering. I'd go to the corner on Fifth Street and find the nearest trolley island. As I got on the streetcar I'd lightly hold on to an adult's coattail. Thinking I was with him, the conductor always let me ride free.

In my family, fireworks and firecrackers were a tradition. Several generations before me built everything from salutes to the most intricate of shells and ground displays. They had never practiced their art for profit but just for the sheer patriotism, enthusiasm and reward seen in the children's eyes at the giant bursts of their shells. I remember the glowing "Oohs and Ahs" only too well.

Back in the East our celebrations seemed to be the center of activity on the Fourth. My grandfather would start that most fabulous day early. From the round attic window of his home on Front Street,

he's fire his shotgun and the clatter of explosions would begin. We were proud. We were loud. Our Flag was everywhere. He and his brothers built that home with old world craftsmanship before the Civil War. It still stands today, housing a forlorn gaggle of about five families. They've turned it into trash. So goes much of the country.

My father knew many in the fireworks trade. He was born in 1897 and had known, among many others, the Long Island Gruccis. He had passed on some, but by no means all, of his pyrotechnic knowledge to me as a child growing up. My exercises ended when California became one of the most liberal and socialistic states in the union and began enforcing its fireworks laws.

He had ties to China through my grandfather who had aided in the building of some of their railroads. My grandfather had been acquainted with the Dowager Empress and some of her court. Before every Fourth of July and our New Year my older brother and I would receive a wooden box from China containing firecrackers, salutes and some of the most unique Chinese items of the time. I recall one of the many objects called a "Plate Wheel." The brand name was "Phoenix." They were labeled "Two Times" and "Three Times." They must have been the predecessor to the plastic "UFO" of today. With a WHOOSH it would soar wildly, high into the night sky spewing an orange charcoal aura. Suddenly it would quit and begin to fall only to recover and, with another WHOOSH soar even higher, ending with a shower of stars and a large salute. That all ceased in 1949 with the communist takeover. It is said that a true friend made of a Chinese is a friend made *in perpetua*. . . . I know this to be true from my own personal experience.

My father and mother have passed on and who those wonderful Chinese were and what became of them has been lost to me. I kept much of the paper from their contents, but never the wooden boxes. Who knew?

Fireworks, other than safe and sane, were soon outlawed in California. However, no one paid any attention to these "unenforceable" laws. Firecrackers and fireworks remained an American tradition. Fireworks of all kinds could still be found in the San Fernando Valley, Burbank, Culver City and most of the beach areas. Chinatown was another place you could buy *anything*!

Which brings me back to another one of the days jumping on the trolley. I was riding down L.A.'s Broadway and to my surprise, on the left, I saw Chinatown. I jumped up on a chair and pulled the cord for the next stop as fast as I could.

For a kid walking through the gates of China into this foreboding place, it could be a little scary. I soon came across some friendly Chinese boys about my age; a couple were a little older. Eventually I

told them about my windfall from China every year... *our wooden boxes.*

They said they had firecrackers too and led me through some narrow, winding alleys to the rear of the Chinatown facade. In the back were many, what appeared to be, small sheds and shacks. L.A.'s Chinatown had been set up in the early thirties when the original had been leveled to make way for the grand Los Angeles Union Station.

We came to a fort that the kids had built; as most kids did then, on the edge of an empty lot. Once inside they opened a crate. It flowed with firecrackers of all descriptions. If I only knew then what I know now. I picked through and found a few packs of my favorite brand, "Zebra". As I was picking, the bottom of the crate revealed an unopened brick. We opened it and through the glassine I could see that the crackers were the same as my "Zebras" only a little larger. The flowers around each cracker were inset with the same rectangular box, but containing different names. This was a 40/40 brick of "7 Star" brand, "Each cracker bears a name: Tojo, Hitler, or Mussolini." World War II had just ended and was still a big thing in the minds of us kids. Luckily the Chinese were on our side. I had some of my birthday savings in my pocket so I managed to buy the "7 Star" brick and some "Zebras". I still have the large label and some of the pack labels. Now I needed a way to smuggle them back to the Alexandria Hotel where my brother and I shared a room.

I put the firecrackers in a shopping bag, got some flowers and placed them on top just in case I ran into anyone. On the trolley I thought everyone was a G-Man. I knew I'd be arrested. Later my brother said he wouldn't squeal if I shared with him. It took *all* the courage of a boy less than ten *not* to light any at the hotel. Later, I gave the flowers to my mother. She never guessed what they covered.

Soon we were in our house and the new kid on the block was the immediate hero. What else with forty packs of 1-11/16" "7 Stars" and those incredible 1-5/8" "Zebras"? I couldn't wait to get to the nearest anthill. *God, they were loud! Goodbye Hitler and Mussolini!*

On New Year's Eve my Father lit some and mused that "They were the best little crackers he'd ever seen." He wanted to know where we got them. "Well Dad, you get on the Broadway trolley and... Just then my brother jammed me in the ribs. *Let's blow up Tojo!*"

There are many more bygone stories of yesterdays. Maybe with my non-identical twin brother Knallkörper, we can come up with more in the future. I hope Eduardo Tellerini might someday read them too.

— GUGLIELMO COLPO DOPPIO

## PLUMBING WITH GUNPOWDER III

*As a dog returneth to his vomit,  
so a fool returneth to his folly.*

—PROVERBS xxvj:11

When I answered the telephone, it was Ernst. "Milano," he said, "you haven't been doing any writing for the *Case-Former* lately. Why don't you write up that plumbing with gunpowder story you told us a while ago? That was a classic!"

I agreed – but first a bit of information for some of you:

*Tower Crane:* the tall crane you see used to put up buildings; very common on some skylines.

*Headache ball:* the crane has two hoisting lines: the light-duty single strand or whipline needs a weight to pull it down; the ball supplies that. The headache part is self-explanatory.

*Kerry Karlin:* a composite of two real people for whom Milano had the displeasure of working. Both were short, fat, and ugly. One was missing an arm, both were missing brains.

*Filthy Phil and Rotten Roger:* two real ironworkers. They didn't do the deed in the story – but they would have. Nah, they would have done worse.

*The setting:* a construction site. It was somewhere out east, I think – Newark, New Jersey? Anyway, I put it there.

*The story:* told to me at a job site years ago. True? You tell me. Funny? God yes! Wish I could'a been there. Actually, I wish I could'a done it.

oooo oooo oooo oooo

Kerry Karlin squinted as he focused his binoculars on the twenty-fourth floor of the building, not a true building yet, but a mass of orange-red structural steel rising above the skyline of Newark, New Jersey. "Damn ironheads," he muttered out of the side of his mouth that didn't have the cheap cigar.

Karlin hated ironworkers more than any of the building trades that worked construction. They were always taunting him to get his fat ass out on the iron if he knew so damn much, always teasing him about not being able to see his feet to walk a beam. Yet every day when the crew came down two at a time riding the headache ball of the tower crane, there was Karlin, pointing at somebody and screaming, "Listen you, I pay you to connect iron, not to take a two-cigarette break on the twentieth floor – next time, and you're through – got it!" Kerry liked the feeling of authority he had over other men, men who were in every way his better, especially physically.

As the job progressed, a few ironworkers were sent down the road by Kerry. The rest of the crew assumed Kerry had a spy or snitch, and kind of tried to keep looking busy even when there was a lull in the job.

One day, two of the "diamonds in the rough" on the crew, Rotten Roger and Filthy Phil, were looking down from an upper floor when Roger noticed a small glimmer or reflection from the shadows by the Satellite toilet next to Kerry's trailer. "Phil, let's move over to the other end of the building, quick!" They did so, putting them out of sight of the trailer and Satellite. Roger signalled the crane whipline and got on the headache ball, and had the crane swing him around, over, and behind the trailer. What he saw was Kerry's "spy," or rather the way that Kerry was standing in the shadow of the Satellite, with his binoculars. "So dat's how dat dogface bastard knows everything." The crane operator returned Roger to his place by Phil. "Phil," he said, "I found the spy. We never could see him with the sun in our eyes. But he tipped his hand today. Now what can we do about dat?" Just as Roger finished his sentence, the noon whistle sounded.

As the crew enjoyed lunch sitting around and socializing, the end of lunch was signalled, as it was each day, by Kerry, who walked out of his trailer regularly at twenty after twelve, and entered his private Satellite. At 12:31 every day, he would exit, and if anyone was still in sight, Kerry usually screamed, "Hey shithead, d'you need an engraved invitation to go to work?" The second time, you got an engraved pink slip. As the men returned to their work, Roger had an idea (unusual for Roger). When they were up about twenty stories, Roger said to Phil, "Every day dat fat slob is in dat Satellite at the same time. He does it to get an extra five or ten minutes out of us. I think I know how to fix his fat butt. Phil, you still got some of those M-80's you was throwing off the building on dat last job you got fired from?" Roger looked at Phil, who had an evil twinkle in his eye and a grin like the Cheshire cat. "Tomorrow," Phil slowly said, "to-mor-row. . ."

Tomorrow isn't supposed to come, but for our three characters, it did. At lunch Phil and Roger walked back to the building early. Out of sight of the trailer, Roger sat on the headache ball, while Phil watched the door of the trailer. Kerry, not to be outdone by his two antagonists, was punctual as ever. He slowly walked to the Satellite. As he opened the door, Phil signalled the crane, and Roger screwed the M-80 into a large nut, his cigarette at the ready as he made a circular descent on the headache ball. Kerry meanwhile was doing his thing, his pants and polka-dot boxers down at his ankles. As Roger was positioned above the Satellite, he lit the fuse and dropped the weighted M-80 down the plastic vent pipe.

As Kerry heard the splash, Roger was whisked away by the crane. The resulting explosion was deafening to Kerry's ears. His body lurched forward as an automatic reaction to the sudden shock. Through the door he went, pants down, his quivering backside besplattered with excrement, sodden paper, and

the green sanitation fluid from the Satellite's reservoir. The rest of the crew played its part. A cheer went up as Kerry picked himself up, hitched up his drawers, stumbled to his car and drove away, to the sound of laughter and catcalls from the men.

The next day, a new "head push" or superintendent showed up on the job, introduced himself, and the work progressed thereafter at a better pace than before. Several weeks passed in complete happiness for the workers, but the new guy, who was a leader of men, was sent to another bigger and more important job. Kerry returned and was quite meek for several days, but his old ways surfaced once again.

Kerry had barrier cones and tapes put up around his Satellite, ten feet on each side. Every morning a laborer would wet the ground and rake the area with parallel lines. Kerry figured this could get footprints if they tried it again. He made false runs to the Satellite, jumped out seconds after entering, and ran around the back side, looking for somebody. His spying was now more blatant, meant to irritate the crew by bird-dogging them openly with his new, more powerful binoculars.

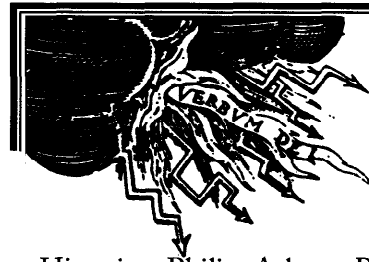
As weeks passed, Kerry's guard began to drop and he played fewer Satellite games. Soon Kerry was back to his old routine, then back to his old self. He couldn't help himself, it was his nature; he was that way from the seed.

Kerry was up to his old tricks. A few shouting sessions, and a couple of guys sent down the road. Finally, his full evil self was in control. He figured he had fired the guy who got him. With total confidence, at a quarter past noon he entered the Satellite and looked at his watch when he sat down, planning to exit at exactly 12:25.

He was about to learn the true meaning of the word *vendetta*. The acrimony in Phil and Roger wasn't so easily sated by one small blast. Just as a soldier gets careless at the front and finds the sniper's bullet, Kerry had more M-80's with his name on them. The next blast was already planned, three M-80's taped together with a bolt for weight.

As before, Roger was descending in an ever-downward spiral, and the bomb went down the vent. Kerry heard the splash. Moving quicker than he'd ever moved, he turned around, pushed the lid down, and held it with all his considerable weight. The M-80's wracked the Satellite with an ear-splitting roar. The force of the displaced incompressible water shoved the vent out of the privy along with an erupting column of green liquid waste. The portion that hit the lid cracked it in two and inundated Kerry's chest and face. His body reacted, jerking backward and through the door. As he picked himself up from the dirt where he had fallen, covered with filth, and walked to his car to drive away forever, the last things he heard were the catcalls of the jeering crew - "Whattsa matter, Karlin, too many beans for lunch?"

— MILANO GIANSLAVI



## Fulminations

*Tuonerà tra mille turbini  
la mia destra potentissima;  
con sentenza rigidissima  
scaglierà saette, e fulmini.*

Historian Philip Ashton Rollins records that a favorite spectator sport amongst cowboys in the old Southwest was to pit two tarantulas against each other in an old soup tureen. The modern version of this pastime is the CNN program, "Crossfire." One recent episode observed by your scribe had as combatants James Carville, President Clinton's one-time publicist and now ostensibly independent attack-dog, and C. Boyden Gray, the Bush administration's White House legal counsel, seconded by the show regulars, Geraldine Ferraro and Patrick Buchanan. The subject was President Clinton's legal woes, recently deepened by the Supreme Court's 9-0 decision that Paula Corbin Jones's sexual harassment lawsuit against the President would not have to wait until he left office. Mr. Carville, if not a madman, convincingly impersonates one; in contrast to his old boss, who is merely a sociopath, or convincingly impersonates one. Carville's usual over-the-top performance completely steamrolled the hapless Gray, and was unrivalled for pugnacity even by the redoubtable Pat Buchanan. At the end, however, everybody grinned for the camera and shook hands. Whatever differences may exist amongst such people, they are all, after all, in the service of the higher flackery, *var. Washingtonensis*, and they differ mainly over whether to shear or skin the sheep.

If Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, or George Canning and Viscount Castlereagh were to be brought to life in the late twentieth century, they would probably appear on "Crossfire," exchange insult and innuendo for half-an-hour, at the end of the session put on *faux* congeniality, and the next day go back to the serio-comic character assassination competition that has become the norm of modern politics. Theirs may have been the era of tragedy, but ours is the era of farce. The demise of the duel is the sort of thing that prompts effusions of self-congratulation on the part of social critics, about how much more enlightened and humane we are than our ancestors - as they like to do, when not engaging in self-flagellation about how awful, racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, ageist, etc., we are.

When duelling was a current practice it was hard to find a contemporary moralist or churchman who had anything good to say about it. Yet it persisted for centuries because of the instinct that some personal disputes required a means of resolution that was clean and irrevocable, rather than being allowed to continue in perennial recrimination and torment for the parties involved. The virtues of the duel are more apparent in our day of debased politics and

coarse manners than they were in the last century, with its comparative gentility and courtesy; just as the value of capital punishment is more apparent in our day of crime and amorality than it was in the more honest and placid world of our grandparents. Both the duel and the gallows provided checks, insufficiently esteemed until they ceased to exist<sup>1</sup>, against the baser passions of human nature.

The particular application of the duel was to issues that surpassed ordinary political or business disagreement, and touched upon personal character and honor – in other words, to the precise controversies with which modern politics seems always entangled, but has no effective way of contending. Contrast the historical and contemporary examples.

Andrew Jackson, in the summer of 1791, married Rachel Robards (*née* Donelson), both being under the impression that she had been divorced from Col. Lewis Robards by an act of the Virginia legislature in 1790. In fact that legislature had only passed an act enabling the case to be tried by a jury (there being no regular law of divorce in Virginia at the time). The court did not grant the divorce until 1793, communications then being very slow, and upon learning of this the Jacksons were compelled to remarry in January of 1794. Although the Jacksons enjoyed a loving and faithful marriage until Rachel died in 1828, periodically, Jackson's political opponents tried to besmirch his reputation by suggesting that his wife was a bigamist, and both of them were adulterers. Jackson ended the political usefulness of such charges quite effectively by challenging and shooting any man who dared make them.

Consider now the Paula Jones affair. If Clinton goes to trial, he will face embarrassment regardless of who ultimately prevails; if he settles, it will be seen as a tacit confession. Undoubtedly Jones's backers and attorneys are motivated by a desire to discredit President Clinton and make money. Even so, if he did what the lady says he did, he is guilty not least of gross lewdness, but of a bizarre lack of judgment that is disturbing to contemplate in the commander-in-chief of a nuclear superpower. Modern society affords Clinton no way to extricate himself creditably from the horns of this dilemma.

Likewise, the ongoing travail of the armed services over its members who have followed the example of their commander-in-chief in randification, can come to no satisfactory end that both punishes those who have abused their positions and upholds the dignity and morale of the corps. In the past, military forces accepted duelling as a means of addressing such conflict, and within strict rules it was encouraged. An

officer whose conduct was unbecoming, if challenged by the one he had offended, had either to fight or resign his commission. The duel thus ensured a respect amongst ranking officers for the proprieties limiting their command over subordinates. Even in Britain, where high military rank went hand-in-hand with aristocratic pedigree and wealth, neither rank nor social status exempted them from the rigid alternatives of fighting or disgrace. Cases were numerous of senior commanders, knights and peers of the realm, facing obscure junior officers; e.g. the duel of the Earl of Cardigan with Captain Tuckett. In Germany and France duels between military officers enjoyed official sanction well into this century.

We think it would be all to the good if the duel, suitably regulated<sup>2</sup> as it was in the day of Joe Manton, could be resurrected amongst our public figures. Instead of appearing on "Crossfire" to exchange jibes, a process with no satisfying conclusion, how much more purifying and healthy it would be if they exchanged *real crossfire*, and ventilated their differences by ventilating each other. A perforated politico here, a shot shyster there, they'd none of 'em be missed – they'd none of 'em be missed. In fact, a few such, judiciously planted, might positively beautify the political landscape. Legislatures could get back to their real business of applying political principles to practice, and civil courts to adjudicating mundane cases about contracts and estates.

It will be recalled that, to the end, the *code duello* specified single-shot, smoothbore, muzzle-loading pistols. We envision that this ancient precedent be rigorously maintained, on the soundest grounds. First, it levels the playing field, offering a sporting chance and even the possibility that both parties may survive. Second, the persistence of old customs characterizes those functions in which a society reposes the profoundest importance. It is for this reason that we preserve the ceremonies and vestments of the church, the academic dress of graduation exercises, the robes worn by judges and advocates, the snuff boxes and blotting sand replenished daily in the Senate chamber – all to the end that a suitable *gravitas* and decorum might prevail in such solemn loci.

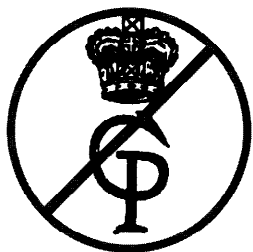
Our attention is especially directed to the *technical* benefits that would arise from such a revival. We can only assume that if political survival depended upon it, the fortunes now spent on pollsters and spin doctors might be redeployed in the purchase of the best grade of black powder. There would be a renaissance in its manufacture, and its quality level might again rise to that maintained in the last century. This alone would make the effort worth while, and a goal we trust would have appreciable incidental benefit to our readers.

— GASSILASCA JAPE

<sup>1</sup> Readers who are inclined to quibble that capital punishment is still provided by statute should reflect that only 246 persons have been executed in the past 20 years; in that same time there have been over 400,000 homicides, most of them technically capital crimes. Even condemned felons stand more chance of dying of old age than as clientele of the executioner.

<sup>2</sup> That is, not by a government agency, but by the old-fashioned manly virtues of courage, loyalty, honor, and honesty – admittedly a tall order at the end of the twentieth century!



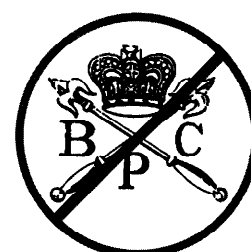


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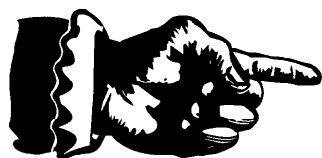
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### WAY OFF THE INTERNET

*'Tis a Dark-Lanthorn of the Spirit  
 Which none see by, but those that bear it,  
 A Light that falls down from on high,  
 For Spiritual Frauds to couzen by:  
 An Ignis Fatuus that bewitches,  
 And leads Men into Pools and Ditches...*  
 — S. BUTLER, *Hudibras*

It seems mere weeks ago that the aroma of thawing pig's manure wafted through the old homestead, heralding the sun's increasing warmth. The carrion crows returned to their nest in the venerable Dutch elm; one morning, as if by magic, a charming circle of fly agarics erupted about its base. Down by the abandoned privy, the first tender shoots of aconite poked up their heads to greet the crimson dawn, and on the rotten stump next the stagnant pool, a myriad baby slugs have hatched. Kudzu gaily festoons the toxic waste dump, whilst the haunting cries of the bloated shitepoke (*"sue, sue, sue"*) and cheeky bustard (*"i-cheet, so-what, so-what"*) may be heard through the stinging nettles. Ere long, the Jimsonweed will be blossoming.

In short, spring has sprung, and the sap is rising in Cyberland as in the rest of the world. In keeping with our theme of decomposing organic matter, this edition of "Way Off the Internet" brings you a redolent thread from some of its learned posters, as well as a (self) important announcement from one of our most prominent cyber-personalities. *Bon appetit* – after this, you'll need it!

— PASQUINO DEI FUGISTI

\*\*\*\*\*

From kewlkid "twistdmind" <twistdmind@aol.com>  
 Newsgroups: rectum.pyrotechwits  
 Subject: Makin piss powder  
 Date: Mon, 13 Jan 1997 10:10:01 -0500

high; i am in highscool and plan to go to collage next year and want to remembur how to make black powder from piss to impress my friends in the chemistry lab when i need to do a project for grades and teacher stuff but kant remembur just how to do it liek the instruksions i saw posted hear aboute a year ago, cuold sombody help me pleeze and i know some of the crap invoveded but the recipee i just forgot totally and the number of chemicles i think but im not shur is like - shugar=12 parts, coke=15parts, amownia(you don't drink it tho) is =9 parts and match heads about 1 box of them crushded up with a hamar to fine grane and added to the piss onece you have made some about 3 gallons in the bowel according to my buddy who saiz this is the best and cheepish way to get out sulfer for the job. so you see we added some to the recipee on our own, oh yea the charcole to is i think about a lunch bag full of krushed briketts.

hear is what i remembur on makin the crap as far as i can tel it shuld work fine cuz me and my buddy made some each 1 of us and together but tell me if im all screwd up or sumpthin or weerd-ed out over the stuff cuz i want to do it rite and be like some of the peepke here who no theer stuff aboute chemistree and crap like that)

you need to get theez howsehold things to make it>

- a good size metal bowel for yurin aboute 5 galons size.
- a cup of shugar and some soda pop.
- a cup or 2 of amonia to dizolv the sulfur with.
- one box book matches for the heads that give yuo the sulfur.
- charcole briketts like the 1's you use for grilling food.
- a kichin straner like you use for vegtibulls.
- a coleman stove for baking the sluge and boyling piss.

1> drink plenty of good strong cofee and coke and mowntan dew like five ours before you start makin the stuff and keep drinking so yule have plenty of niter for the powder. you can even con- vinse your' girl frend to do some for this projek, actuilly this is good becuz i red it in some book aboute womam making it for war time, but anyhow you must do about 3 galons of raw pee total be- fore you start the other stuff.

2> crush up a pile of charcole briketts to fill up a gallon worth of space with a malet to fine grane sized like what you get if you used flower for baking cookeys and bred.

3> cut off a hole box of match heads and mash them to bits with a nice hammar. place the pul- vurized powder in a straner over a bowel and poor the amonia over them to remove the sulfur as you smoosh the mass with your fist to get it all off and leeve the match paper behind. then add the goo to you're piss supply rite away and mix it up good witha spoon.

now your reddy to start the job.

4. now that you have plenty of hot piss mix you shuld boil it down to sluge outside on the stove becusze the stuff stinks like crap, and you will have a thicker goo to work with from this mess. Its like making old fashin mapol shugar the way they do it up north cuntry. poor this crap onto a large cooky shet and let dry in sunshine for 3 weeks till the poochy looks like salt on top and weerd soy sand underneeth, its nice.

4b; now you need to scrape of the niter salt witch also contanes the sulfur fule you got before so be carfull not to scrape to hard or bangO you will find yurself smoking reel fast like my buddy did 1 day. he forgot to be slow and KAWOOSHEE he was lit up like a sigar smoke clowd altho he only got miner burns only, anyway be carful about it you cant be to carful now days with all the bad news and naybors watching out actully the nay-

bors called the cops and we had to qwit it for a wile.

5> ok its time to all all the ingreedyints and make a nice poweder for well like M80s and stuff like that, rockits to and even you can make fireworks like the pros say here altho i am not shure about the powder yuo wold use to get them up in the ski i herd it dont work well.

6: first crush up all the piss salt that has the sulfur so bee reel carful not to blow up by using a nice rolling pin for making peetza on a opened up paper shoping bag. After that you can add the wite piss powder to the black charcole powder and mix by hand so you wownt get it to lite up and burn the crap outa you're house or your par- ints place cuz that would suck. oh yea i almost forgot to mension that you shuld wate until some- body posts here with the rite recipiee parts or it wont work very nice as me and my buddy tride it until it workted but we waystid much to much powder and now weh'r out of it-dam.

hope that is rite and pleeze no flames cuz i dont like tham and it hurts when peeple get mad at you cuz you want to help evrybody in the world. i wnat to help you and not hurt anybody and i thot this would be fun beesides, so rite to the grupe and post it hear.

"twisted"

\* \* \* \* \*

From Bill "Penis Rocket" Crocket  
<illpenis@cisco.com>  
Newsgroups: rectum.pyrotechwits  
Subject RE: Makin piss powder  
Date: Wed, 15 Jan 1997 13:11:37 -0500

In article "Makin piss powder" dated Mon, 13 Jan 1997 10:10:01 twistdmind@aol.com wrote ;

>4b; now you need to scrape of the niter salt  
>witch also contanes the sulfur fule you got before  
>so be carfull not to scrape to hard or bango

I think your problem is you were making fules, and not fuel...that would lead to the mind going blankity blank blank

penile

\* \* \* \* \*

From slymeone@chu.chum.libbo.edu (Slyme guy the quiet one)  
Newsgroups: rec.pyrotechwits  
Subject: Makin piss powder  
Date: Wed, 15 Jan 1997 01:48:46 GMT

In article "Makin piss powder" dated Mon, 13 Jan 1997 10:10:01 twistdmind@aol.com wrote ;

>high, i am in highschool and plan to go to collage  
>next year and want to remembur how to make  
>black powder from piss to impress my friends in  
>the chemistry lab when i need to do a project  
>for grades and ..SNIP..

The process to yield potassium requires, first, digestion of the uric acid by bacteria to urea, then ammonia, and then the ammonia (as ammonium ion) to nitrate ion, as well as the substitution of potassium ions for the sodium. Then the  $\text{KNO}_3$  has to be separated from everything else, usually by recrystallization through the photosynthesis of micro-organisms during exothermic sublimation of the urea ions under a controlled REDOX reaction for optimal out put phase delimiting with minimum gas production, hence the need to incorporate a vacuum controlled thermal chamber.

It's a prolonged and smelly process that was necessary to gunpowder manufacture and production of nitric acid prior to about 1870, but it's been replaced by mining of nitrates from deposits similar to salt licks, except for a few people keeping the knowledge of how to do the job alive such as the fairly good article by twistdmind@aol.com, with some slight modifications he may be leading the pack in this new area of pyrotechny.

SLy

\* \* \* \* \*

From Gillilag "Chips" Westbound  
<gillchips@cyber.geeks.com>  
Newsgroups: rectum.pyrotechwits  
Subject RE: Makin piss powder  
Date: 20 Jan 1997 03:13:24 -0800

Most any stockyard, dairy farm, poultry or egg farm should be able to supply you with all the urine you need. While the raw urine might work you might be better off redirecting your experiments toward the ground... the urine has been accumulating on.

So an interesting question is "is the 'composted agriurinate' carried at most garden centers closer or further away from  $\text{KNO}_3$  than 'fresh piss'?"

Gilli

\* \* \* \* \*

From Ben "Wright" Dover <bendo@mit.edu>  
Newsgroups: rectum.pyrotechwits  
Subject RE: Makin piss powder  
Date: Thu, 16 Jan 1997 18:19:37 -0500

Hey SLy! While we're on the topic of useful things to be gotten from urine; I was just browsing through this really fascinating site about alchemy at <http://www.netwits.com/alchemy>. It's really nice.

They claim to have over 30 megs of "information on alchemy in all its facets." It's full of netwit alchemical writings and transcriptions thereof along with a healthy dose of cybersynthesis. Anyway, this is one document chronicled a certain Wally Wad-Wanger's adventures in "PeePeeNiter" production. The procedure calls for "Urine well fermented in a Tub following a well orchestrated red wine induced golden shower party, then it's exposed to the outside air for seven Weeks until its taste becomes sweet like candy." The practitioner of the art, then "incorporates" an unspecified ammount of soy juice and charcoal dust into his vat of piss poochy and heats this treat in a retort oven such that the refined material dissolves in cane sugar thereby rendering a pure workable niter that's compatible with all black powder formulae. Excellent for indoor pyro favors too.

I am anxious to try the mix myself, with  $\text{KNO}_3$  becoming quite a scarce commodity around this part of the country. Hey, who needs K-Power anymore anyway? with fun formulae like this - we can all share our resources.

\* \* \* \* \*

From Tin Pidgeon <tinp@ucal.bezerkley.edu>  
Newsgroups: rectum.pyrotechwits  
Subject RE: Makin piss powder  
Date: Fri, 17 Jan 1997 10:10:10 -0500

Hey Ben, SLy and Gilli

Speaking of capitalizing on human waste-products, I think the time has come for me to announce the new book which is in the final printing stages at this time and is scheduled for release in two weeks.

I'll be accepting orders immediately and shipping to members of this News-Group on a first-cum first-serve basis. Ten exciting chapters written by well known Cyber freaks who articulate your favorite subjects with eloquence.

The Art and Science of Cyberpyrotechny  
by Tin (Mann Alota Bs) Pidgeon  
1st Edition  
Cybergeek & Pullit Publishing Co., NY

Ch1 - Getting started in Cyber-Pyro: This chapter is devoted to the newbie in cyberpyroland and covers such as; netwitetiquette, geekenvy, using and abusing the Merck and Knowing and understanding your Cyber Mentors.

Ch2 - The world according to Theoretical Chemistry: X-Spurtly written by one of our own -SLy- "The SLimy One" for your edification. Read and Heed this chapter if you plan on becoming somebody in Cyberland.

Ch3 - Capitalizing on the University Hierarchy and public resources; This is a must do - must have chapter for those in our institutions of higher learning who wish to advance their images and reach for the stars, if you will, while gaining access to a myriad of government and publicly funded computer resources for entertainment purposes. Written by yours truly.

Ch4 - Cyber Indoctrination & the List Servers: This chapter is an extremely detailed overview of the various electronic mailing systems and those few highly revered ICONS who run them. Another must read philosophical tool that will propel you into stardom in cyberpyrophia.

Ch5 - The evils of Chlorate; Learn the don'ts and the evil traditions being promoted in cyberworld by the non-PC people and why they want to kill you. This chapter includes several real life dramas by a host of old characters on the Net who advocate the use of these extremely dangerous chemicals. You will come away feeling refreshed knowing that the Cyberchemists care about your health enough to guide you through the sea of cyberiniquity.

Ch6 - The complete Film Canister Shell; An award winning treatise on this highly promoted practice written in plain English by the premiere theorist in this field. Dr. Ben Dover will guide you through this fascinating field and prepare you for crown dialog on the subject in cyberpyroland. You will advance rapidly through this chapter to become "one of the pros" in no time.

Ch7 - Black Powder from Piss: The title is fairly self explanatory, however, there are a number of new techniques in development that have not yet been released to public domain and can be found in this exhaustive study. Probably one of the "hottest" topics in cyberpyro today...if you dare!

Ch8 - CyberPyroSynthesis: The transformation of your lame incompetent self into a Professional Cyber Freak with all the trimmings. This topic is well executed in true form by those who are well versed in the discipline and from whom you will take instruction. Truly a win-win chapter for the hearty.

Ch9 - Winning the Flame War: No seasoned CyberPyroFreak traverses through the front-lines without a flame fighting toolbox of tricks, and you too can acquire the warewithall to conquer your adversaries on the Net. This chapter covers all the requirements and introduces you to the vast assortment of underhanded tricks that will get you through to emerge squeaky clean.

Ch10 - Mastering CyberPyroLand: A true winner will transcend from the old ways of the past into

this new and exciting field, and this chapter explains it all. You will come away from this study with a new character that we call "The Child Without" and an advanced self esteem that will shock even your closest colleagues. You will become very familiar with our goals as CyberPyros X-sports while mastering our number one virtue "Success is in an Image." The casual Web surfer will yield to your power and revere your words with astounding regularity. You will transform into a NetWit with astonishing speed at a level that will go unrivaled for decades to cum.

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of Peregrine Pinchbeck, Ph.D.,  
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containing all the  
latest Intelligences  
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by Smobias Tollet, A.B.,  
C.D.E., F.G.H., etc.



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—M. JACKSON

*"A giant among men."* —T. THUMB

*"Un punto aquí, un punto alla, y en medio  
muchísimo toro."*  
—B. GRACIÁN

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## THE SEEDS OF DISASTER (ANOTHER TALE OF MISSPENT YOUTH)

It should be obvious to one and all that smoking near pyrotechnic devices presents an unacceptable hazard. And yet, if one gets away with a dangerous practice long enough, the horrifying becomes routine. Ask Evel Knievel, or trapeze artists that perform without a net – or maybe those guys that try to traverse Niagara Falls (slowly I turn, step by step, inch by inch) while tightrope-walking.

And so it wasn't unusual so see Louis Heinold at the kitchen table, assembling an Estes Saturn V while smoking a joint. I'd brought a 6-pack of Bud and knocked on the door, smelling the smoke before he opened it. What sat upon Mrs. Heinold's kitchen table was most impressive. The Estes Saturn V must have been designed by someone as stoned as Louis was that day. Powered by a cluster of five C-series engines on the lower stage and three for the second stage, it was an impressive rocket indeed. And Louis had grown bored with sending rockets up, only to watch them drift down by parachute into trees, onto highways, power lines, and so forth. After I taught Louis how to make flash powder, his rockets never again came down in one piece – a warhead substituted for the parachute.

This time Lou had added a new twist. Curious about the abilities of air defense and air traffic control radars, he had laboriously sheared a good portion of a roll of heavy aluminum foil to surround his warhead, the idea being to fill a portion of the sky with chaff. This, hopefully, would send back confusing data, or jam the radars, perhaps creating a UFO scare, causing a mid-air collision, or, for all he knew, scrambling the bombers at Westover Air Force Base. With a lot of luck, he could start World War III, he mused eagerly through those bloodshot, glassy eyes.

Louis had given up with the tedious, unreliable, Mickey-Mouse electrical firing systems. Now he used an ingenious complex of quickmatch that always fired the engines close to simultaneously.

Back in those days we didn't much bother to clean our marijuana; it was full of seeds as we smoked it, and they usually exploded, burning holes where their remnants landed. It was really tough on one's wardrobe.

I guess we weren't terribly surprised when a seed exploded in our joint, but we watched it, as if in slow motion, bounce its way across the table toward the motor assemblies. It happened too fast, and we were too slow to do anything but follow that darling little seed with our eyes. I had time to dart a glance at Louis, who wore a sad, resigned look. He probably would have appeared so upon noticing a trouser leg getting caught in a threshing machine.

The little seed hopped one final time and found the exposed match. I considered my options: run out the door? No, not enough time. I saw that Louis

was already lurching for the fused motors, and saw that he hadn't a prayer of pulling them apart in time. I opted for diving under the kitchen table, and as I did so I heard the fuses spitting and the motors roaring to life in that small kitchen.

I covered my head and listened to the drum solo of all those motors ricocheting around the kitchen. I wondered vaguely what they were hitting until one bashed me in the ribs, instantly followed by one on the butt. I'd left an ear exposed, which was creamed next. Louis could be heard howling and thrashing somewhere up there in the *mêlée*. Glass breaking, heavy impacts, and that monstrous hiss were all else that could be heard.

I knew that the thrust duration of those engines was 3.5 seconds, so in theory, taking the second stage into consideration, it would all be over in 7.0 seconds. I took one last punch on the shoulder before things began to quiet down. But there was the warhead to consider too, wasn't there? For all I knew, it could be sputtering away, a foot from my head.

I chanced a glance around, just in time to see Louis toss it into his mother's aquarium, no doubt hoping to extinguish it. Bad move. It sank, its fuse bubbling doom, and again I crouched under the table, only to be soaked and deafened a moment later as the aquarium blew.

All I caught was a slash of glass across the calf. I looked up in time to see the truncated torso of the little diver that had bobbed up and down in the aquarium, bouncing to the floor.

Coughing, I stood up, eyes burning in the thick, acrid, white smoke. The sight of Louis astonished me, covered in aluminum foil as he knelt like a monk at prayer. He groaned and stood up, removing his hands from his head. A ghastly welt was forming right between his eyes on his forehead. It grew as I watched in awe, at the rate of Jiffy Pop, into enormity.

The kitchen was not damaged – it was ruined. One motor had hammered its way into the cupboard where the fancy eating stuff was kept. It acted as a bull in a China shop, and fragments of heirlooms were all that remained.

The cabinetry was gouged, splintered, with propellant burns abundant. Tropical fish flopped around on the soaked carpet. A motor had got out the front window, and to Louis's chagrin, had cracked his car's windshield. Another punched through the ceiling, wisps of smoke still puffing forth. It had been a very busy ten seconds. The motors had bashed us badly, and I wondered how many times they had bounced around that kitchen. Certainly many dozens, perhaps hundreds of impacts, had gashed the wallpaper, broken and singed everything, and two had flown out the windows.

I looked at Lou, who was fingering a rising bump on his jaw. He reached a finger into his mouth, worked it for a few moments, and spat a bloody

tooth into his hand. He sighed, looked around, and started giggling. Well, what else could you do? It was infectious, and soon I was chuckling too. Lou looked at his tooth, grinned at me, and when I saw the gap where it had been, I too was giggling helplessly. Lou pointed at my head, still grinning, and I reached up to feel the knot over my right ear. It was beyond belief that part of my head could be way out there. It had pushed my hair into a fuzzy ball. This too brought gales of hysterics from us both. I handed Lou a Bud, cracked one myself, and we tried to think of a lie that could explain this. The only thing we would do was try to minimize the destruction. We had time for that. Perhaps Lou and I were the pioneers of an overworked technique, particularly popular in the Clinton administration, known as damage control.

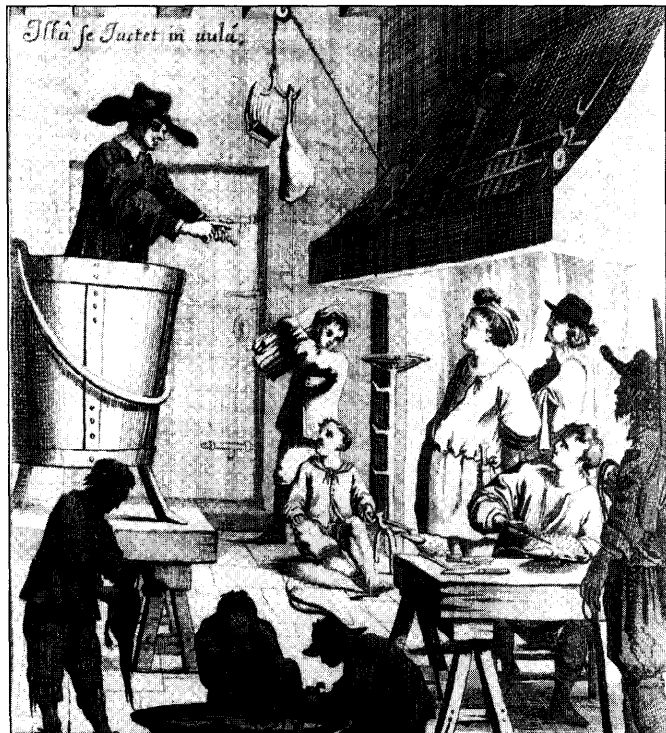
Out came the spackle, plastic wood, circular saws, paint cans, etc. We even went to the tropical fish store with a baggie full of dead fish, and although horrified, the clerk duplicated these remnants of the carnage with live fish as best she could, as well as a new aquarium and little diver.

The clerk finally had to ask, "What happened to those fish?"

Lou paused pensively before replying, "Depth charge."

It was difficult work restoring the kitchen, because although artists at wrecking things, we weren't such hot carpenters. Still, it was passable workmanship if you didn't look too closely. The china cabinet could be explained by the dog, which we hated anyway.

Lucky for us it was that Mrs. Heinold was in Florida. It was the only thing that saved us, giving us time to make repairs.



Regular staff meeting at the JOURNAL OF  
PYROTECHNIC FARTS AND SAUSAGES.

Yet nobody gets away such an atrocity completely unscathed. Ask the Clintons. We still couldn't account for one of the rocket engines, though we looked high and low for it.

Wouldn't you know it was Mrs. Heinold who found it? It had apparently scooted through the hallway and into the den. When she went to turn on a reading lamp made from a ceramic Buddha, she found an Estes C-6-5 engine protruding from the Buddha's broken belly. When confronted with this, all Louis could do was shrug, giggle, and grin that gap-toothed grin.

— EDUARDO TELLERINI

## THE LITERARY FRONT

*Habent sua fata libelli.*

—TERENTIANUS MAURUS

It is rare that the *Case Former* staff finds a work of literature for which it can make an honest-Injun recommendation, and for this reason this column has not been a regular feature of these pages. Once in a great while – including many years ago – something worth while comes along of which we feel an urgent need to inform our readers. This issue's candidate is a book called *Dynamite Stories*, written way back in 1916. It has been around all along, just waiting to be discovered by our readers.

The name Maxim may remind people, if it reminds them of anything, of a fancy and expensive restaurant in Paris, and its numerous imitators. Those more historically inclined may recall Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim (1840-1916), an American-born British subject who invented, among other things, the Maxim silencer and the Maxim machine gun. But Sir Hiram had a brother, Hudson (1853-1927), who also had the family interest in things that went bang, and was indeed a considerable inventor himself, and proprietor of various explosives and munitions interests. It was he who wrote *Dynamite Stories*, a medley of factual information about explosives and, let us say, "human interest" stories about their often unexpected intersection with people in all walks of life.

We won't spoil it for you further, giving everything away – but will tell you that, among others, the book contains what has to be the original of many stories we have heard concerning the dog that retrieved a stick of dynamite with a lit, capped fuse. There is a remarkably cold-blooded account, "The Forgotten Bit of Fulminate," about the author's loss of his left hand to the eponymous article.

"A spark from the ignited piece entered my left hand between my fingers, igniting the piece there, with the result that my hand was blown off to the wrist, and the next thing that I saw was the bare end of the wrist-

bone. My face and clothes were bespattered with flesh and filled with slivers of bone... The following day, my thumb was found on top of a building a couple of hundred feet away, with a sinew attached to which had been pulled out from the elbow."

The following paragraphs relate a harrowing journey by horse and wagon, railroad, and on foot, to see a doctor; and conclude, several days later, with the sardonic comment of Maxim's young woman stenographer – "You, too, have become a shorthand writer."

Another tale, "Discharging Pat," recounts the carelessness of an Irish laborer at a dynamite factory, whose conduct prompted the foreman to march forthwith to the superintendent's office to demand his discharge. The colloquy was interrupted by an horrendous blast and breaking of glass, followed by Pat's booted foot landing on the office floor – as "(t)he superintendent dryly remarked, 'Evidently, Pat is already discharged!'" In "Lines to a Lady," Maxim tells of having picked up a package of fulminate detonators at Fort Lafayette and travelling home with them on a trolley car (well before the advent of the D.O.T.):

"No sooner had I comfortably seated myself in the car than a huge, determined, militant-looking woman entered, brushing a few small men aside. Seeing all the seats occupied except the space where the package was, she turned and hurled herself backward and downward. Her movements were so quick that I had barely time to throw my left arm firmly under her, and, although I am unusually strong, I had all I could do to support her enormous bulk..."

Maxim rescued his package in the nick of time, and, waxing poetical, composed and wrote on a notebook sheet the following verse, which, when he arrived at his street, he "handed... to Her Militancy":

"Dear Madam, I'm an anarchist,  
That package was a bomb,  
I'm on my way  
Someone to slay,  
And this is really true —  
I didn't want to waste that bomb  
On just the likes of you."

"Weary Willie's Discomfiture," a story about a tramp burgling a house, who took refuge up the chimney as the owners arrived home, comes to its inexorable conclusion when the "ingenious Yankee neighbor" advises them to clean the chimney by throwing several pounds of gunpowder into the open fire, which, flashing, would blow the soot out of the chimney. "Sir Fredrick's Bonfire" is a tale told on an eminent authority of the time, Sir Frederick's Abel. "A Pick-aninny's Treasure Trove," doubtless, deserves to be prized for its politically incorrect title alone, while "The Turkey that Went to Bed" departs from the

theme of explosives, if not of explosions, to detail Maxim's first patented invention, a pressure cooker which "blew up... (t)he kitchen windows were blown out, the door ripped off its hinges, and the stove demolished."

Our favorite story, however, is "When the Wash Vanished," about a wag who decided to nitrate a handkerchief and send it to the Chinese laundry with the rest of his wash. Arriving at the laundry he was greeted by the proprietor, whose arm was in a sling, as if nothing had happened... and only upon putting on his laundered underwear did he discover the Chinaman's revenge.

Brief, laconic, and mostly tinged with *schadenfreude*, it is hard to imagine these anecdotes finding a publisher in these days of "sensitivity" and bleeding hearts worn on sleeves. They are reminiscent of the short stories of Ambrose Bierce, Mark Twain, and H.L. Mencken, Maxim's contemporaries in those more rugged and bracingly vigorous times. We found our copy one year at the P.G.I. flea market table of one of our well-known vendors of photocopied archival literature. Keep your eyes out and you may find your own copy.

— ERNST PFANTODT

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## DROPPINGS

Pyrotechny's again been assaulted  
By a poseur titularly vaulted  
Who without expertise  
Produced a treatise  
that leaves this reviewer revolted.

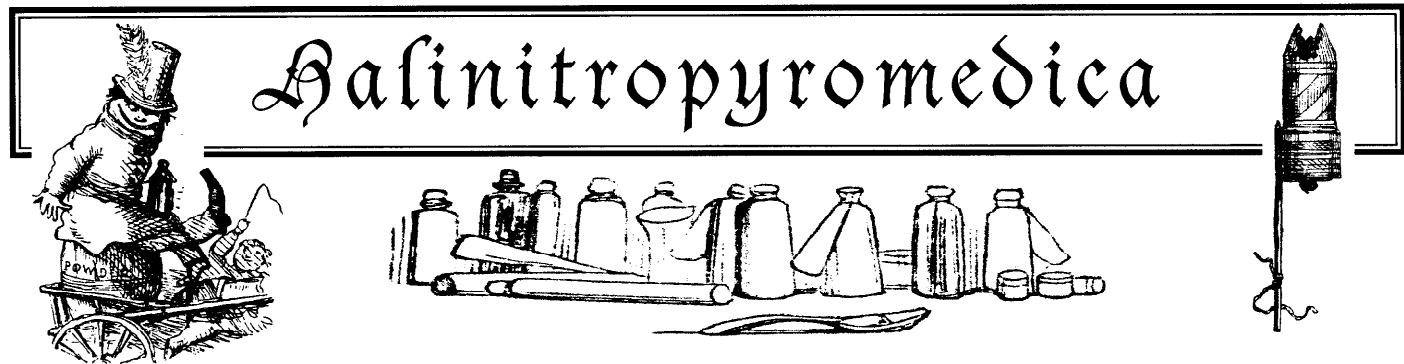
Of matters he claims understanding  
He's not had so much as a hand in  
But with this opportunist  
That's just what the tune is  
His ignorance notwithstanding.

It takes a dose of skull duggery  
And equal proportions of puffery  
To take work of others  
And slap on your covers  
To sell to pyrotech wanna-be's.

But honor is just not an option  
To the intellectual co-option  
Of an artform besieged  
By P-fucking-h-D's  
Whose aim for our craft is adoption.

It is doubtful my life will endure  
Till the day when the expert *du jour*  
Makes proof in the skies  
As to why he is wise  
And his words are worth more than manure! 🍷

— LANCE VÆRCK



It has come to our attention that certain persons (the predictable ones, really) have chosen to regard this column as an elaborately contrived platform for making political jibes. Even some of our own members approach it primarily as humor, and are then disappointed when it is not so uproarious as some of the other features in our journal. We wish to remind both groups that all of our recommendations and case histories come from official reference texts of the regular medical profession. If anything we have erred on the side of caution by using only the standard dispensaries, and only those remedies which have been proven by extensive use over long periods of time. When we can bollix a bureaucrat or shock a safety-faker, it is clearly the icing on the cake, but we needn't stretch the truth in order to do so. For example, the story of the clerk who attempted suicide by swallowing potassium chlorate and sulphur was taken verbatim from Gould and Pyle's classic *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, originally published in 1896. In general our favorite works run from the mid-Victorian period up to the first World War, with a few secondary sources as late as the second World War. This means after medicine had become relatively scientific, but before vested interests, socialism, and extreme trendiness ruined it beyond repair. From that time came most of the really valuable developments, such as antiseptic surgery, vaccines, antitoxins, and I.V. fluid therapy; these things no longer grab headlines but are still responsible for most of a doctor's value and for most of the impact of "modern" medicine on poor foreign countries. When our nation was new there was a tendency to treat almost every disease with phlebotomy or large doses of mercury — it is a shame we could not have stayed at a happy medium between that and today's government-funded, lawsuit-happy circus, but ours is not the age of responsibility or self-restraint. Most of the old inorganic drugs are all but forgotten, and this column is one of the few published forums which provides an opportunity to discuss some of them. The botanical drugs have undergone a great revival, but unfortunately this has been associated with left-wing or counterculture groups, which understandably cause suspicion in more conservative people. Many of the herb promoters endorse highly dubious practices such as "aromatherapy", or recommend herb teas without any suggestion that the dosage matters, or

even claim that these products are not drugs and don't have side effects. The typical physician assumes (falsely) that such drugs are not effective, while he proudly practices "scientific" medicine by giving mood-altering drugs to small children who don't like school, or eighty-dollar fashion antibiotics to welfare bums with the sniffles. If there were any sense in the world, Echinacea and blood-root, as well as calomel and Fowler's solution would once again be listed in the pharmacopœia, while C.A.T. scanners and "Ceclor" would be considered alternative medicine, to be used only in a few cases where nothing else has worked, and where the patient or a private charity can afford them.

*Gums, resins, and balsams* are a fascinating study which can only be touched upon in this column. A great many which we cannot even mention have been used in varnishes, cements, and the like, and some of these could undoubtedly be employed as pyrotechnic fuels or binders. Also there are dozens of the traditional plant drugs which depend on pharmacologically active resins, but of course these also contain cellulose, starches, tannins, and many other substances as well. Only the purified resins themselves are likely to be useful in fireworks. The chemistry of these materials is complicated and often obscure, and the terminology is sometimes used in a rather sloppy manner: in general one hears the word "gum" applied to any sticky material which oozes from a tree. Shellac is sometimes called "gum lac", but it, like red gum and gum copal, is more properly termed a resin. Opium is a dried latex and would not really fit either category, even if it were obtainable at a reasonable cost. *Oleoresins*, as one would expect, contain volatile oils in addition to resins; common examples are those of ginger root and capsicum pepper. *Tars*, properly speaking, are produced by destructive distillation and include pine tar, coal tar, and juniper tar, the latter sometimes called "oil of cade". None of these show a great deal of promise as pyrotechnic fuels, but we mention them because the word "tar" is applied by the laity to asphalt. This is, of course, a good fuel in cast propellants, while the powdered natural asphaltum is occasionally used in colored stars. Pine tar, however, has long had a traditional use in pyrotechny in the preparation of tarred string, that handy adjunct in so many applications. A traditional Italian receipt calls for a mix-



ture of equal parts of *catrame* (Stockholm tar, the *pix liquida* of the dispensaries) and *pece greca* (colophony resin) to be melted together; then a small amount of olive oil is added to the mixture and it is poured into cold water to congeal. Afterwards the preparation is drained of water and kneaded into masses of convenient size for rubbing onto string. This material bears some resemblance to the pharmacopœial *emplastrum picis*. In its stead, roofing tar of suitable consistency may be substituted.

*True gums* are complex carbohydrates which contain glucosidal acids; they dissolve or swell in water to produce an adhesive mucilage. Unlike resins, balsams and such, gums do not dissolve in alcohol or ether. They have little physiological effect, although some in large quantities act as bulk-forming laxatives. They are extensively used as excipients for preparations ranging from throat lozenges to oil-in-water emulsions. The arch-member of this group is Gum Arabic (Acacia), but Senegal, Sterculia (karaya), and Tragacanth are also important. Gum Arabic generally produces a stickier star composition than dextrin, and is infrequently used. However, there are a few compositions, including the Italian "Pampanino" with its coarse granular aluminum, where the gum seems to give a superior result. For these it is worth knowing that Senegal is very similar to Arabic. Tragacanth, which produces a very viscous mucilage in small percentages, has been used in slurry mixtures for sparklers and match heads.

*Balsams*, although rarely if ever employed in fireworks, have a distinguished medical history. They are defined by Youngken's *Textbook of Pharmacognosy* as "mixtures of resins with cinnamic or benzoic acid or both and generally a volatile oil". Most balsams are thick, syrupy liquids, although a few such as Tolu balsam are plastic solids at room temperature. Their physical properties make them unsuitable for stars, but in small percentages they might prove very useful in torches. Copaiba balsam, one of the few which does not have a pleasant odor, was once a favorite treatment for gonorrhœa and other infections of the urinary tract. When taken internally its volatile oil component is absorbed into the circulation, then eliminated mostly by the kidneys. Tolu has some value in coughs, while its delightful bouquet, like spicy vanilla, makes small amounts useful in candies and perfumes. Storax or styrax has rarely been used alone, but along with benzoin, aloe and Tolu it makes compound tincture of benzoin. Used externally, as well as in the popular steam inhalation for bronchitis, Tr. Benz. Comp. must be one of the oldest medicines in continuous use. In the Middle Ages it was known as Balsamum Equitas Sancti Victorias, although whether it can withstand the siege of the infidels in Clinton's administration is anybody's guess. Peruvian balsam, with a pleasant odor resembling that of Tolu but a consistency like molasses, is useful in a variety of skin conditions, especially sluggish ulcerations

and wounds which refuse to heal. It may be applied as a simple alcoholic solution, but the most versatile preparation is an ointment of 10% to 20% strength. To keep it from separating, the balsam should first be triturated with castor oil before adding the ointment base. Where a less greasy base is desired, the balsam mixes well with simple unmedicated hand cream. The author has enjoyed good results from these mixtures in both people and animals. One case was a middle-aged man with an indolent leg ulcer, a nasty patch of raw flesh more than four inches across. He had spent months with different doctors in the area — one would prescribe a corticosteroid combination with no result, so the next would come up with another steroid cream of the same class. If the use of anti-inflammatory drugs where the problem is one of *not enough* inflammation seems strange, it is because most younger doctors are simply lost without steroids; they use these or antibiotics in almost every routine ill. Finally, after a \$600 biopsy test which solved nothing, they told him the condition was stress-related, but still did not assign it a name or reduce its severity. He tried 20% Peruvian balsam cream, and in one week the area was almost completely covered with new skin. Since then it has waxed and waned, suggesting that there may be some underlying circulatory problem which also needs treatment, but he always goes back to the balsam for the best results. It boggles the mind to think how much needless suffering occurs, and how much money is wasted every day, when doctors don't use old enough technology.

Thus far we have only conducted one test using *Balsamum Peruvianum* as a fuel, but it showed a certain amount of promise. When chlorate of potash is well mixed with the balsam, in a ratio of 82:18, the consistency approaches that of modeling clay. Approximately 3-1/2 ounces of this composition was placed in a gap between two hard granite rocks, each about one foot thick and two feet wide. An automobile hubcap was placed on top of the rocks; neither it nor the rocks actually touched the mixture. Initiated with a standard #6 cap, the mixture made a jolly bang and launched a mangled hubcap well into the air. It did not have the sharp "crack" of a true high explosive; the performance was more like that of a good cannon cracker without the need for a casing. Inspection revealed that one rock was broken almost all the way across, and the other also showed serious damage. Undoubtedly slight modifications could improve the performance. Meanwhile, in such an age, there is something inspirational about a fragrant herbal wound dressing which doubles as a plastic explosive.

*Resins* are insoluble in water but soluble in alcohol, ether, chloroform or fixed oils. They have lower melting points than most fuels, but at room temperature many are brittle enough to be reduced to fine powders. Medicinal value of the usual firework

fuels is minor, but many of the resins known as medicines would be potentially useful in pyrotechny. Indeed some of these *were* recorded in the older firework literature, including benzoin, mastic, and asafœtida. Others are far too expensive for routine use, but might nonetheless be found at a surplus chemical dealer or an old store basement.

In the costly group are a number of resins which act as powerful purgatives. Podophyllin, already mentioned in our last column as wart remover, is most likely to be found in a modern pharmacy. Others with similar properties include jalap resin, scammony, elaterin, and gamboge. The latter has a brilliant golden-yellow color and was used, along with other resins, in the varnishes of the old Cremona violins. All the members of this group are potentially dangerous; and must be used in small doses, combined with other drugs to moderate their effects. One must distinguish between the simple powdered root, which is powerful enough, and the extracted resin, which is much more so. Asafœtida, an oleo-gum-resin named for its rank garlicky odor, is one of the old remedies often singled out for ridicule by the progressives. Most of its effect probably *was* psychological when it was used to treat hysterical women, or hung around the neck in little bags to ward off infection. However, it was considered an effective antispasmodic in horses as well as humans; the old veterinarians were anything but trendy, and horses don't read health articles, so there may be something to it. In past centuries it was sometimes added to firework compositions to produce an acrid, nauseating smoke.

Guaiac, from the *lignum vitae* wood which makes such fine mallets, is another resin which could be useful in color compositions were its cost not so prohibitive. It is known to most modern practitioners as a test for occult blood, but it has also been given internally in a variety of disorders, especially rheumatism. The author cannot vouch for its efficacy, but the worst side effects to be expected are increased perspiration and a mild laxative effect. Usual doses were 5 to 30 grains of the resin itself, or one-half to one fluidrachm of the ammoniated tincture. Don't worry about the "childproof" caps, as nobody who isn't really sick will want a second taste.

Shellac has little or no physiological effect in modest doses, but has been used for coating tablets. Pine rosin, so useful in blue stars, has been employed as a diuretic for livestock — especially horses, whose kidneys may be sensitive to more irritant drugs like oil of juniper. In human medicine it is confined to external use in plasters and the stiff ointments called cerates.

Benzoin, a balsamic resin, has a peculiar, pleasant aroma which is difficult to describe. Both the simple and compound tincture are still widely sold for wound dressings and steam inhalations. Benzoinated lard is mildly antiseptic by itself and makes a good base for more complicated ointments. Benzoin itself can be bought as a rather coarse tan-colored pow-

der; because the resin component is somewhat soft and sticky it tends to agglomerate into larger lumps over time. It *has* been used in firework compositions, and its tackiness and moderate burning speed might make it a good secondary fuel in compositions containing large amounts of powdered metal. Benzoin is of course the original source of benzoic acid, the salts of which have become so popular in fireworks. Soluble salts, like those of sodium and ammonia, are quickly absorbed into the bloodstream. The benzoic acid is then excreted by the kidneys as hippuric acid, which acidifies alkaline urine and also acts as an antiseptic in the urinary tract. Adequate serum levels of benzoic acid also increase and partially disinfect bronchial secretions, and can lower fevers. The usual dose of sodium benzoate is five or ten grains, but as much as sixty grains at a time can be given with little effect on the digestion, circulatory or nervous system.

Myrrh, despite its exotic aura, costs only a little more than benzoin or shellac, if as much as the shellac from some pyrotechnic suppliers. Its appearance is similar, an orange-brown powder of medium fineness, but it has a heavy, spicy bouquet of the sort associated with Oriental incense. A complex oleo-gum-resin, its quality varies depending on whether it was obtained in Somalia or Yemen, and how much of the oil it contains. Taken internally, it increases the appetite and the digestive secretions, and reduces the griping caused by many purgatives such as aloes. It is said to stimulate the uterus, but by itself is not potent enough to be hazardous in pregnancy. White's *Materia Medica and Therapeutics* of 1902 says that it increases production of white blood cells; if this is consistent it would account for some of myrrh's ancient reputation in infectious disease. Certainly it has general antiseptic properties, and is especially useful in mouthwashes and gargles. The tincture, a simple 20% solution in grain alcohol, is a good application for cold or canker sores. The author has only begun to experiment with myrrh in pyrotechny, but can report that with chlorate of baryta it gives a fine color and a moderately slow burning rate, suitable for lances or pillbox stars. ¶

— SCOPPIETTO DULCAMARA, *I.O.O.J.*,  
*B.M., B.Ch., B. Pharm., P.G.I., etc.*



## A PASQUILL

On seeing K\*\*\* K\*\*\* enwrapt in mutual bloviation  
with C\*\*\* W\*\*\* at the W\*\*\* W\*\*\* B\*\*\*



*Hos brevitās sensus fecit conjungere binos.*

Malignant folly now unites these blocks,  
Like two Wall Street jobbers merging  
watered stocks.

— EPISTEMON EPISTEMOFF



# TELLERINI'S CULINARY CORNER



*Science is a collection of successful recipes.*

—PAUL VALÉRY

*As Mr. Tellerini has been injured in an accident (not with fireworks), and is presently unable to write his columns, we of the medical staff have undertaken to write one for him – and we hope he finds it apropos. The following simple but flavorful dish has long been popular with the author's family; the original source has been forgotten, but it can't be more than fifty years old. Obviously its theme is that ingredients from diverse cultures, which are generally not used in the same dishes, can harmonize surprisingly well. Unfortunately whoever invented it gave it the awful name of United Nations Chicken Casserole – enough to make us cringe every time we ate it. But we could see no copyright notice, and as anyone seriously interested in pyrotechny knows, this is an age of petty plagiarism, so we simply changed the name. It tastes far better as...*

## WHITE MAN'S BURDEN CASSEROLE

Cut two frying chickens in serving sized pieces.

Dissolve three chicken bouillon cubes in five cups of hot water; add one teaspoonful of salt and bring to a boil. Then stir in two cups of instant rice and simmer, covered, for 25 minutes. A footnote to the recipe states that 2/3 cup of long grain rice may be used; this would of course require more cooking time.

When the rice is done add four ounces of mushrooms – canned ones are acceptable but lightly cooked fresh ones would be preferable. Season with a dash of nutmeg, a tablespoonful of curry powder, and a tablespoonful of parsley.

Place the mixture in a shallow casserole dish or cake pan, and spread to an even depth. Arrange the chicken pieces on top and sprinkle them with paprika. Finally, bake uncovered at 350° for an hour and a quarter.

Numerous variations spring to mind. Today it is hard to find good chickens which have been properly bled, but almost any gallinaceous bird from the ringneck pheasant (China) to the chukar partridge (Afghanistan) would be worth a try. Even though India is already represented by the curry powder, peahen would be a great temptation, and with our new improved name, Guinea fowl or African sand grouse would be most appropriate of all. Shiitake mushrooms (Japan) and Chanterelles (France) have more flavor than the mundane *Agaricus bisporus* found in most grocery stores. If picking your own, remember that some of the *Coprinus* species (shaggy manes and inky caps) behave like the drug "Antabuse", and are thus completely unacceptable at Grand Manifestations.

The choice of wine to accompany this recipe should be the same as for any good poultry dish, bearing in mind that it must have enough character to assert itself alongside nutmeg, curry and paprika. We do not hold with the simpleminded notion of serving white wine merely because the meat is white. Many of the artist types and other fashionables responsible for the modern white wine craze are, as Imbibo would say, no-account and candy-assed. The great chefs such as Escoffier generally served claret with chicken or with gamebirds; the English gentry did likewise, and often went as far as rich red Burgundy with pheasants which had been hung. Obviously if one is serving shrimp before the W.M.B., champagne or white Burgundy would be a good accompaniment to both, but otherwise we recommend something made from Cabernet Sauvignon. Don't risk your Ch. Lafite or Ch. Latour until you have already tried the casserole with one of the lesser French classified growths. Considering the revised theme of the recipe, it would be hard to beat a bold South African red.

When savoring this dish it may help to contemplate sea breezes on the Spice Islands, safaris for kudu and lion, or dancing houris in gossamer veils. Try *not* to think about what has become of your own culture, or where your taxes are going.

*The ports ye shall not enter – the roads  
ye shall not tread –  
Go make them with your living, and  
mark them with your dead.*

— S. DULCAMARA





# Lyra Pyroburlesca

*Big bombs, small bombs, great guns and little ones!  
Put him in a pillory!  
Rack him with artillery!*

— W.S. GILBERT, *The Grand Duke*

## THE PYRO FARTS & SAUSAGES RAG

*(Air: "A Soldier and a Sailor,"*

*The Beggar's Opera, on facing page.)*

A Charlatan and Cheater,  
A Safety-faking Bleater,  
A Canuck bureaucratic  
(To Freedom most traumatic),  
Together did conspire,  
Together did conspire.

The Charlatan reneg'd, Sir,  
And so the Canuck leagued, Sir,  
Together with Kosanko,  
For whom we have to thank, O!  
These friv'lous lawsuits dire,  
These friv'lous lawsuits dire.

To start a pyro Journal,  
More stale than any urinal,  
To bolster up their status,  
As touch'd with the afflatus  
Of fireworks expertise,  
Of fireworks expertise!

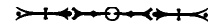
There, rockets made of Physick,  
And other things as quizzick,  
Twixt safety-fake outrages,  
Do grace the Xeroxed pages,  
Of this great imposture.  
Of this great imposture.

But how to make a Shell, Sir,  
Cold it will be in Hell, Sir,  
Or anything of Use, Sir,  
That won't our Art abuse, Sir,  
Before you therein find,  
Before you therein find.

They fill it with their maunderings,  
And intellectual wanderings,  
To point to when they witness,  
However really witless,  
Their testimony be,  
Their testimony be.

Now, business may be slow, Sir,  
Another steals your shows, Sir,  
The I.R.S. your purse, Sir,  
The D.O.T. still worse, Sir,  
The A.T.F. your fate,  
The A.T.F. your fate.

All this is but mere plucking,  
You'll get a *really serious* fucking,  
When th' Expert's hand is feed, Sir,  
In Court he'll do the deed, Sir,  
And steal your whole Estate,  
And steal your whole Estate!



## THE PATTERSONG OF THE BURNT MAIDEN AND THE AMBULANCE CHASER

[from THE KOSANKO, Act I, sc. 2]

Burnt maiden: My pinkie has a little burn,  
Amb. chaser: A million dollars it will turn!  
B.M.: But is it worth such deep concern?  
A.C.: Listen, lass, and you will learn!  
The defendant will reduced be to  
eating mustard sandwiches,  
After paying the outrageously  
excessive damages,  
That the Jury will return!  
And how shall I afford your fee?  
B.M.: We'll take it on contingency!  
A.C.: That's how I'll afford your fee!  
B.M.: We'll take it on contingency!  
A.C.: You'll take it on contingency!  
And that's how you'll afford our fee!

B.M.: What shall we do to make our case?  
A.C.: We'll advertise in Cyberspace!  
B.M.: There find a man who'll lie apace,  
A.C.: An Expert Witness – one so base,  
His well-remunerated and profound  
dissimulation,  
Will move the Jury to a state of  
righteous indignation,  
That's how we your case will ace!  
But how shall I afford his fee?  
B.M.: He'll take it on contingency!

B.M.: That's how I'll afford his fee!  
A.C.: He'll take it on contingency!  
B.M.: He'll take it on contingency!  
A.C.: And that's how you'll afford his fee!

— BEN TROVATO

# THE PYRO FARTS & SAUSAGES RAG

(Air: "A Soldier and a Sailor," *The Beggar's Opera*)

A musical score for a piece titled "THE PYRO FARTS & SAUSAGES RAG". The score is written for a piano and voice, featuring a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The music is arranged in a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words hyphenated across lines. The score consists of eight systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are: "A char-la-tan and Chea-ter, a safe-ty fak-ing Bleat-er, a Can-uck bur-eau-cra-tic (to Free-dom most trau-ma-tic), To-geth-er did con-spire, To-geth-er did con-spire, The Char-la tan re-neg'd, Sir, And so the Can-uck leagued, Sir, To-geth-er with Ko-sanko, for whom we have to thank, O! These frivo-lous lawsuits dire, These frivolous law-suits dire." The score ends with a double bar line.

A char-la-tan and Chea-ter, a safe-ty fak-ing Bleat-er, a  
Can-uck bur-eau-cra-tic (to Free-dom most trau-ma-tic), To-geth-er did con-  
spire, To-geth-er did con-spire, The Char-la  
tan re-neg'd, Sir, And so the Can-uck leagued, Sir, To-geth-er  
with Ko-sanko, for whom we have to thank, O! These frivo-lous lawsuits  
dire, These frivolous law-suits dire.

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*From: A mysterious anonymous secret unknown discreet ghost-writing phantom.*

*Regarding: Wob Peever, A.K.A. "Peevis the Butthead."*

He don't wike us vewey much. He shuwd stay home and enjoy wots of west and wewaxation. I understand there's wots of wildewife where he's fwom and things move a wittle swower aaround there. Hahahaha. He dont wike wate aftergwow sandwiches with wilted cheese and wettuce with bawoney and sawami. He can't stand hot headed hippies with wubber wimmed gwasses. No... he shuwd definitwy stay where he is, where all the peopwe awe about as sharp as a sack of wet mice. They do things nice and swoe. He did wite a book once. Wots of wittle pictures with inaccurate desquptions. Wots of swoe peopwe with pyretackas and two kids who wost all their mawbles and were hit in the pace wif bomatoes. In the future... pwease don't feed the weasel... pet your wittle monkee instead!

— Submitted by CASTILLO MALDITO

Brings lots of weasel repellent. Rumor is, the master magician of disappearing products is planning on making an encore performance in Amana. Hold on to your wallets, lock your doors and windows. Hide your goods and plug your ears.

Cause Chuckie Weasel's coming to town.  
He's getting guys pissed, naming *his* price.  
His wife manufactures body lice.  
Chuckie Weasel's coming to town.

His kid is really creepy,  
They beat him with a rake.  
The target was his pointy head,  
But they missed it by mistake.

So... you better not shout,  
You better not cry,  
Expert witnesses ought to fry,  
Cause Chuckie Weasel's coming to town.

Well... that's all for now. Let's wait and see who gets out of line at the Convention in Amana. It's sure going to be real interesting. Until next time...  
*salute!*

— MIGALUCC

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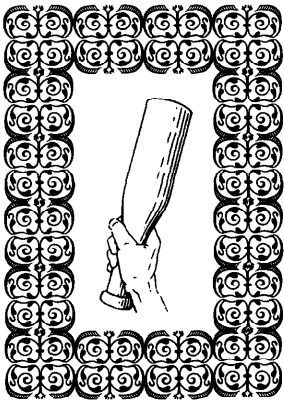
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The Society For the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny.



# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

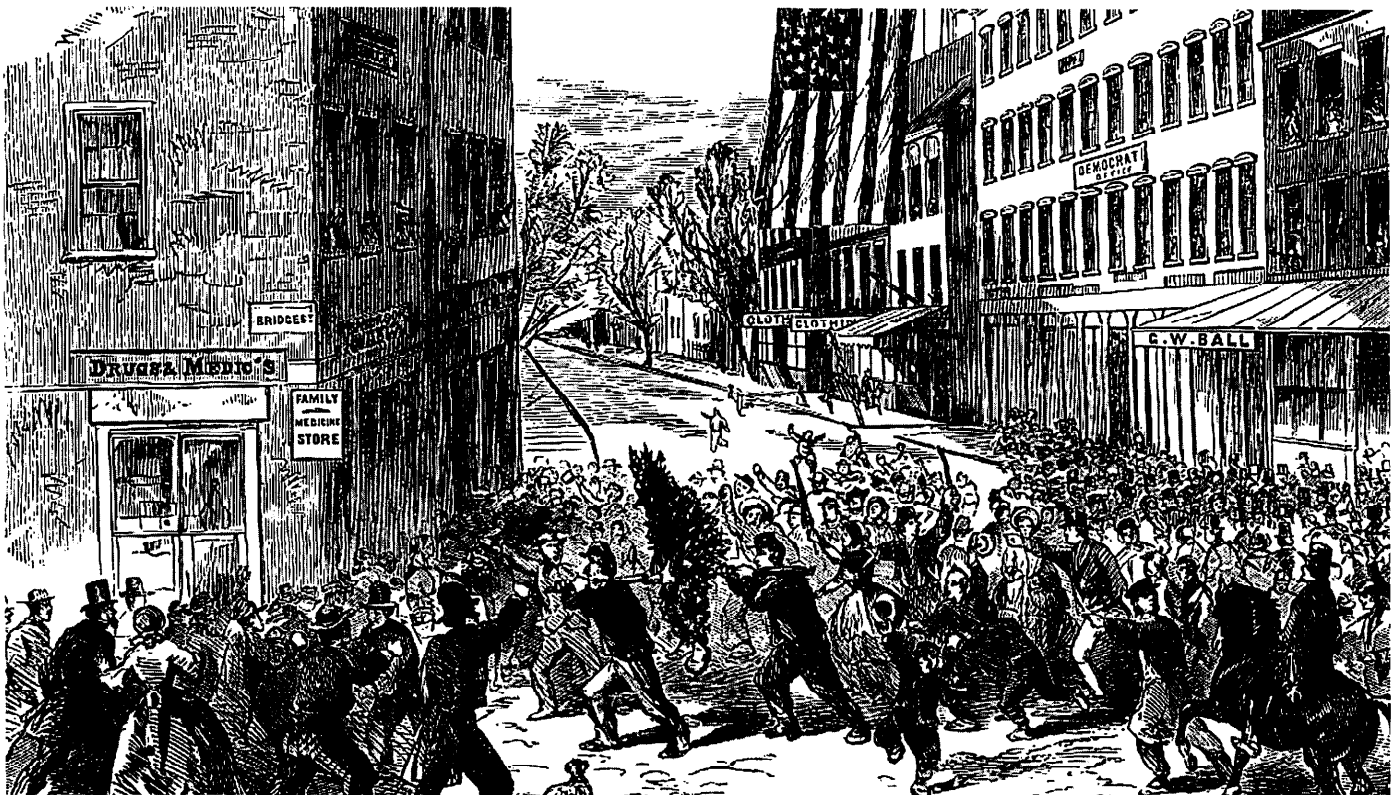
*"Magna est Veritas et praevalabit." – I. Esdras, iij: 41.*

VOL. IV

JUNE, 1998

NO. 2

## TARRED, FEATHERED, RIDDEN OUT OF TOWN ON A RAIL!



*"If it had not been for the honor of it, I think I could not have stood it."*

### THE SILLY SEASON

*Oh, the little dogs. How they bark at me!*

—SEN. JOHN RANDOLPH OF ROANOKE (D., Va.)

Old-time newspapermen used to refer to high summer as "the silly season." They observed that when things slowed down for the summer, with legislatures and courts out of session, serious news dried up, and various types of silliness began to appear as news, for lack of anything else to report. There was also a customary belief that as the heat of summer waxed, it had a deranging influence both on man

and on beast – hence "dog days," when dogs were likelier to go mad, and even people did strange things under the influence of the *Föhn*.

These days the recess of legislatures and courts is probably a harbinger of *greater* sanity, rather than the reverse; but summer is still the silly season, in our little bailiwick of pyrotechny as well as anywhere else. How otherwise can we explain the heat rising from the keyboards of the pyro-net-wits, even as serious fireworks folks are breaking their backs during the historically busy period around the Fourth of July? The politics of the Pyrotechnics Guild International are heating up, and pursuant to this we have



received some very peculiar correspondence here at the *Case-Former* offices.

One anguished message came from a Companion who indicated she had heard of plans for a special edition of the *Case-Former* to be mailed to all P.G.I. members, attacking certain candidates for election to P.G.I. office! Given the *schwärmerei* of rumors being propagated on the Internet, we were at some pains to make clear that this is not the sort of thing we do. But the real corker was the following message, posted to one of the computer mailing lists by an individual (we hesitate to use the term *gentleman*) who shall be identified here only by the sobriquet applied to him by a very wise and perceptive lady, who calls him "The Flipper":

Date: Thu, 18 Jun 1998 22:07:58-0400  
From: (real name omitted)  
To: (computer list illegally expropriating  
trademarked initials)  
Subject: conspiracy  
Message ID: (omitted)

"Most on this List are aware there is a not so 'secret' political party within the PGI. It publishes a newsletter that anonymously attacks people and ideas, with many of these attacks quite personal. It states it was organized to be the 'saviors of pyrotechny' yet many of the goals and principles espoused are counter to those of the Guild, and the open and democratic process it supposed to be operated (*sic*).

"It wants a closed fraternity that only those that are deemed worthy by the powers that be can belong (*sic*). It does not want an open Guild that anyone can belong to and that educates and shares information. This group disdains those that do not share their views about fireworks or the Guild and goes out of its way to personally (*sic*) belittle those people and those positions.

"There are also individuals who use various dirty tricks to attack and belittle those with whom they disagree. When one makes this claim of course it makes them (*sic*) sound paranoid and it is hard to offer 'proof' since these activities are generally done anonymously.

"It is sad and embarrassing to see such activities, especially considering how many of the conspirators are so gifted and talented; and even more so to know that a number of the current leadership not only belong to this group, but are very active in it as well.

"Unfortunately, the Guild has a long history of this type of activity, much of it involving the very same people engaging in it today. Over the years there have been officers, chairs (*sic*), leaders and members who have been driven from the Guild because of these personal attacks. A lot of gifted and talented people have left and it means the Guild ends up having to try to fill their shoes with people less experienced.

"While these are generalizations, they are important to keep in mind when evaluating the political activities of the PGI."

When your humble servant first read this to an old friend and loyal Companion of our Order, his response was to break out in laughter; for he, as we trust you, our venerable Companions and readers will also do, recognized this as a deliberately hostile and distorted view of our Order and its publication, the *Case-Former*.

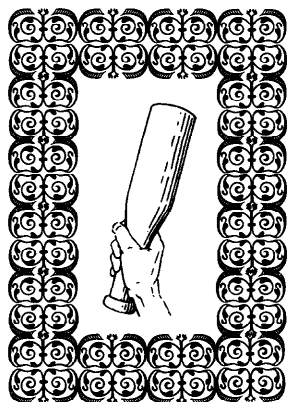
Our first reaction was that of the nineteenth-century newspaper editor who, having been tarred, feathered, and ridden out of town on a rail, was afterwards asked by a friend what it was like. He responded, "If it had not been for the honor of it, I think I could not have stood it!"

What to do? Should we simply maintain silent composure and a tongue of good report, following the advice of a late noblewoman who was often embroiled in controversy – "Never complain, never explain"? Should we attempt a serious defense, and lay out our principles to justify them before the profane, as well as the enlightened? Or, should we share it with our Companions, many of whom no doubt pay no attention to the constant turmoil of the computer fora, regarding them as worthy of just neglect; and having done so, add some ironic comment, and share, as we have with our Companions so many times, a well-deserved horselaugh, that omnipotent deflator of pretense and humbug? We choose the last of these courses.

A perennial tendency of human nature is to come to resemble that which we oppose, or at least what we think or fancy we are opposing. Thus did Calvin, ferocious denouncer of the oppressions and errors of Rome, cause Servetus to be burnt at the stake as an heretic; even as Rome would have burnt Calvin. Thus, in more recent times, did the Bolsheviks set up a state that ground and oppressed working people in a manner that far exceeded that of the most villainous capitalist of Karl Marx's most perfervid imaginings. Thus has our own government, in the supposed defense of liberty, taken, or more perniciously, persuaded the people voluntarily to surrender, many of the liberties their ancestors took for granted.

Our friend The Flipper is the principal operator of a computer forum called the "Activists List." Membership in this list is "a closed fraternity that only those that are deemed worthy by the powers that be" are permitted to join. On it are published libelous attacks on P.G.I. officers and members, accusations of corruption (without any supporting evidence), unflattering characterizations (one P.G.I. member was called "a cancer") and other material that clearly shows disdain for those that do not share the views of its operators about fireworks and the Guild,

(CONTINUED on inside back cover)



# The Cafe - Former

*Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny*

I.: O.: O.: J.:

“Magna est Veritas et prævalebit.” – I. *Esdras*, iij: 41.

VOL. IV

JUNE, 1998

NO. 2

## ALLÔCUTION OF THE RT. VEN. BIANCO GASOLINI, P.:G.:C.:

Three cheers to our 1997 P.G.I. convention chairman! The minimum number of “product demos” and the quality of at least one of the ones exhibited was a welcome relief from the usual grind of maniacally paced Chinese saturation bombing we’ve come to expect from the PGI’s membership. But have things really changed for the better? We understand that Scary Splattingly, proprietor of Worthless Fireworks, a large commercial concern from somewhere in the Northwest has a display planned for Wednesday night of the upcoming convention.

According to Splattingly, “it will be large, fully choreographed to music, about 25 or so minutes long, and will involve (*sic*) a wide variety of pyrotechnic materials.” Sounds like another one, especially when one remembers that Mr. Splattingly, in cahoots with Knob “Clownboy” Heaveland made up the (thank God!) now defunct “Public Display Interference Team” which had been the bane of conventioners a few years back. I just don’t understand why there isn’t some sort of a short leash put on these idiots!

Another fear is that Splattingly or others of his ilk may be positioning themselves for a run at the PGI presidency. He certainly seems to post a lot of drivel on the wienernet, and apparently has quite a following. If this happens, we can expect even more musical displays and even more inferior shells than ever. Some seem to feel that the PGI must “entertain” the members and their families... personally, I derive more entertainment from conversation with my companions and alcohol intake than I ever have from another few thousand Temple of Heaven shells shot to Neil Diamond’s “Coming to America!” I say let’s send these dorks to Disneyland to be entertained, and the real fireworks types can reclaim the Guild for their own!

—BIANCO GASOLINI



*De omni re scibili, et quibusdam aliis.*

—VOLTAIRE

Dear Eduardo,

My question does not really relate to fireworks, but I know you fellows are authorities on anything which involves black powder, and one of your earlier issues mentioned “anything that goes bang”. Well, as you probably know, getting more women involved in the shooting sports is absolutely the IN thing – all the big gun magazines say it is essential for political reasons as well as being stylish. They even suggest there is something wrong with guys who don’t include their wives, daughters, etc. and I don’t want anybody thinking I’m not a team player. My 20-year old wife, Samantha is spunky and loves physical activity but has always refused to look or behave like a man in any way. Also she is very dainty, five feet one with a 19” waist, so most of the trendy outdoor clothes wouldn’t fit her. But after reading all the persuasive articles I gave her, she finally had a change of heart and is psyched up about trying clay pigeons. She says on a skeet range there are no thorns to tear her dress, and her heels won’t sink into boggy ground. Now my problem is that I only have two shotguns, and the Wards bolt-action .410 is too awkward for quick second shots. Besides, Sam is really getting into women’s equality and would be insulted by a puny .410, which she knows gives inferior patterns. The other gun is an old damascus double with hammers, called a W. & C. Scott Premier Grade. It must be a 12-gauge because it weighs about the same as the new twelves, and that includes a thick steel buttplate which has protected the fancy stock from damage. Samantha likes it because it is pretty, and I inherited a bunch of brass Winchester shells which fit it. They are marked “No. 10” on the bottoms – maybe this is some kind of lot number. Anyway, it was no use writing to the major publications. All their

experts say I can't shoot damascus barrels, and one of them called up and made a pass at my wife, which I didn't understand because she is nothing like the girls in his stories. Can you help?

R. Winger  
Hicksville, Idaho

Dear Mr. Winger,

You do indeed have an unusual problem, which demands careful handling. But as the experts say, you must do your part to fight the tomboy shortage griping our nation. Stamping out antiquated, demure behavior in young girls is bound to help the conservative cause.

The old brass shotshells take large pistol primers, sold everywhere, and special oversized wads of which I sent you a large box. A good load for a gun such as you describe is five drams of FFFg and 1-1/2 ounces of shot. If Sam is still enthusiastic after three or four rounds of skeet, you might offer to take her goose shooting in Scotland, where they use larger guns. Another way to take advantage of such dedication would be to buy her a regular skeet gun and have her go professional, although staying home alone might tempt you to look for a mistress wherever you found Samantha. Just out of curiosity, where *did* you find her? There is no charge for the wads, as we're always happy to give a little nudge in the right direction. ♡

—EDUARDO

P.S. If she happens to lose interest early in the game, I'll give you a hundred bucks for the Scott.

## ANATOMY OF A PYRO-CLUB

It was a typical southern July evening, humidity high enough to cut with a knife. With dusk quickly approaching, the hills were echoing with Sage Greed's newest threat. Here's something we can all use he said, a brand new box of volleys guaranteed to knock 'em dead. With industry strength loads of 50 milligrams or less, put your money down now and buy the best. For hours the mammoth 50 watt p.a. bellowed in the woods, while the restless gathered at the B-lines, using Sage's catalog to scratch those places he only could. "Enough is enough," a loud voice said. "Let's cut to the chase and cut off his head." With the info-mercial finally over, the clock struck twelve. The proprietor yelled "the noise must be stopped," but the few who were left just told him to go f\_\_\_k. Some were relieved while others were asleep, the consensus was, this club is a bust. For the talented few who came from a far, they went back with their wares illegally transported in their cars. Some returned home safely while others did not. If there is a next time, play it safe, be smart, and invest in Sage's stock. ♡

—CASIMIR SIMIENOWICZ, JR.

## THE FUTURE OF PYROTECHNY IN A DREAM

*On dune and headline sinks the fire:  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget — lest we forget!*

—RUDYARD KIPLING, *Recessional* (1897)

The ancient "science" of interpreting dreams has certainly undergone great changes of fortune since the Egyptians practiced it five millenia ago. One should not dismiss the Old Testament prophets lightly, since in that time and place one false prediction could make a fellow the guest of honor at a "rock concert," with real rocks, outside the city gates. But in general this field has attracted more charlatans, crooks and mental cases than anything outside of government. In the modern Babylon, Freud and his followers have certainly not changed things very much. Sensible people generally feel that dreams mean little or nothing at all, in ordinary cases. This was certainly the majority view in the great Victorian era — we are reminded of Scrooge telling the Ghost that he was really only a bit of tainted food.

Yet strange things can happen: the author's favorite tourbillion, for example, was conceived in the wee hours in that peculiar state between sleep and wakefulness. While it can be considered a classical design and was clearly influenced by older ones (the casing and vent hole proportions are essentially Wein-gart's) there was no drafting or conscious logic involved. The composition was not taken from any book, yet it gave the right burning rate on the first try. It is likely that most dreams are "replays" of things already known, that memories come flooding out in a way that is usually meaningless but will occasionally result in creative synthesis.

With this in mind, the author will admit that one ought not to watch the T.V. late news at all; besides being depressing, its brief "sound bites" are not conducive to deep thinking. And just because one has stock in a fast-food chain doesn't mean one should eat three of their fish sandwiches, especially when they have been sitting under hot lights all evening. American "port", a drunkard's dream, is not one of our finer wines, and even the best port would be a lousy choice with fish and dill pickles. And after all that, *anybody* should know better than to have a double chocolate malt for dessert. But we all make mistakes, and the resultant nightmare had such a ring of truth that the author decided to share it with you, our patient readers.



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# The Metropolitan Meddler

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## Public Monument Desecrated

As usual this time of year, police are keeping an extra close watch on the most costly edifice in Central Park, the Tomb of the Unknown Bureaucrat. Aside from random acts of vandalism, this particular monument has long been subject to a seasonal pattern of attack. Police can't watch it every minute, note Chief Bernard P. Fife IV, who admits there has already been some minor damage this year, apparently chips from rocks. In past years there were more cases of damage from bullets and from large exploding fireworks, which despite having been illegal for fifty years are still occasionally seen on the black market. Intensive crackdowns at all levels of government have fortunately reduced their sale to the minimum, and the seasonal waiver clauses added to the Fourth Amendment helped in the searches.

The Tomb was constructed in 2001 after a series of meetings on how to best capture the character of the century just past. Built in a style  
*continued on p. 5-C*

## NEWS BRIEFS

Parents of all sexes are reminded that the deadline for school applications has been moved up to the 20th of July. Children to be enrolled in any of the city's public schools must have their fingerprints, genetic profiles, racial sensitivity training cards, and mood drug level adjustments on file by that date. In recent years the deadline has been August 15th, but the school computer system is down again, and officials are always overwhelmed with work when this happens.

Rap singer Deep Doggy Dung realized a life long goal Friday when he performed at the Kennedy Center. Now a multimillionaire, Dung looked back on his days as struggling young artist, especially the 1980s when some right-wingers wanted to censor his work. But by the middle of the '90s rap music and ghetto fashions were accepted even in the most conservative business magazines. "You know, you get the kids, there ain't much the parents can do," said the Doggy in an interview, "and it IS important to the economy." Unlike some other radical rappers he was able to smoothly make the transition to mainstream, and is now a hit among aging baby boomers with his own versions of traditional favorites such as *Dung Love*, *Dung at Heart* and *Yesterday When I was Dung*.

Fizz! Boom! Bang! Audiences had better prepare for a thrill as the city's annual July 4th display goes off tomorrow night in Central Park. Our news team visited the display site to learn more about this old custom. We found that most of the rockets take the form of round PVC balls, although a few made in the Orient are cardboard balls. "These give us more problems, like blowing up too early and scattering fire all over," said one of the young display operators as he held up a Donkey brand paper ball. "So you can just imagine how dangerous things were in the old days when all they had were paper shells." But fireworks can still be hazardous, with some of these professional devices reaching a diameter of 125mm, the legal maximum. Each of these roman candles has a charge of gunpowder attached to the bottom, and is lowered by its electrical wires into a tube or mortar made of HDPE. Even the standard 62.5 and 75mm sizes could still kill someone who is hit by them, although this rarely happens, notes longtime firework fan Senator C.P. Wheeze. The Midwest legislator is well known for his social legislation, including the latest round of rulings to protect debtors and bankrupts, and his Commission to Replace Everything Except Plastic is responsible for some of our current federal standards for fireworks. And while accidents still happen – burst tubes, rockets loaded upside down, electrical malfunctions, people tripping

over wires – the advances in public displays have helped phase out the antiquated habit of people shooting smaller explosives in their own backyards. A few of these items are still permitted, but until recently laws varied a lot from state to state and this encouraged illegal trafficking. Fortunately, fireworks were included in the Federal Uniformity Acts of 2013, a step which has done much to eliminate the menace, and the United Nations has also been helpful in controlling import quality.

As with anything so old, there are many traditions and legends associated with fireworks, with some old-timers waxing nostalgic for the shows of their youth. There used to be more varieties, most of which had to be abandoned because of safety concerns. "No doubt they made some good stuff in those days," said Professor Peregrine Pinchbeck, Ph.D., who has been a published author in the field for over 20 years. "It's not always possible to completely sort out truth from legend – old men always think the grass was greener and the sky was bluer when they were boys. At one time there was a mania for really big aerial shells of five, even ten kilos, in fact I have catalogs showing them at 250 and 300mm! And I myself have seen some which were cylinders instead of balls, with 3 or 4 separate stages, but most of these had a very potent and dangerous explosive unit. Even after this component was banned we had a hard time getting reliable ones,

and it was even harder to get plastic which was strong enough to stand the lifting powder. Besides, even 30 years ago when most of this stuff was still allowed, the big shooters had already gone over to Chinese ball shells, so there can't be that much difference. The fancy cylinders, when they did exist, were basically an elitist thing requiring special handling, and wouldn't really be appropriate in modern conditions."

Although it is not very well known to the general public, it was actually legal for private parties to make their own pyrotechnic devices as recently at 2006. Of course this was never encouraged by officials; it was simply an oversight based on the legal definition of "manufacture". For decades this unlikely hobby persisted, partly because of its low profile and because few people were actually hurt. All this changed at the end of the twentieth century, when it became highly publicized in electronic media. The tragic deaths of several teenagers were attributed to this aggressive promotion of dangerous chemicals and low-grade literature, finally prompting the Gore administration to launch its investigation in 2005. At first the Committee focused on an organized group of hobbyists, the PGI, but despite its reputation very few of the members actually made anything at that point, and few warnings were issued. More fruitful was the list of licensed amateurs, since the majority of states had adopted a uniform hobbyist safety code in 1999. Professor Pinchbeck notes with a sheepish grin that he himself did amateur experiments in his younger days, and was one of the authors of this code. "We intended it to simply be a benchmark and protect amateurs from using dangerous methods," he said. "We never dreamed it could backfire in this way." But under the state of emergency, all hobbyist licenses were suspended and their holders issued warnings and placed under observation; many important arrests were made among their associates. The next step was for the government  
*continued on p. 8-A*

## President Vows to Continue Struggle

With the fourth of July so near, President Orca Windbag once again addressed the nation about the danger of outdated methods of celebrating on its birthday. She quoted a case in Nebraska, only last year, where a 13-year old constructed an explosive device from the heads of stick matches, the old firestarting product which is still legal in most rural areas. The young person, who lost a finger, reported having heard stories from old men about the fun they used to have with exploding fireworks. "I can't believe things like this still happen," sighed Windbag. "We have such an advanced society, with the government doing its very best to help everyone along the right path. We have all kinds of things I never dreamed of when I was a kid, standardized extracts from natural medicines, clean electric cars, watches that tell the time out loud for the blind. And now this!" Part of the problem is that while professional fireworks are very high-tech, it is pretty easy to make a crude explosion, notes Kon Krookshankie, Ph.D., a science advisor to the president and

a person with much experience in this area. In states where guns are still legal, ammunition can be dissected to get the gunpowder which is the basis for firecrackers. And Krookshankie adds that such items as chlorine bleach, which requires only a signature for buyers, can be used to make oxidizers for even more powerful devices. But none of this deters the First Black Woman President, who has been on the forefront of progressive politics since her days as a television talk-show host. She continues to promote more counseling and regulations to protect the most vulnerable Americans, our children. And she notes that women have long been the leaders in safety legislation: "It just comes natural to a mother who is used to locking up sharp knives to protect her babies." The First Woman President, Jade Fondue, was also a leader in protective government but the tradition goes back more than a century, when the quaintly named *Ladies Home Journal* began the first aggressive campaign against fireworks in 1911  
*continued on page 12-A*

## FDA Commissioner Announces Coffee Regulations

"Caffeine is a dangerous alkaloidal drug," said longtime FDA Commissioner David Kessler, recently re-appointed by President Windbag. "We must make sure it is properly regulated, and kept out of the hands of children."

Señor Manuel Ordoñez, of Cali, Colombia, speaking for the coffee-  
*continued on page 12-A*

## AMATEURS AND THE YELLOW PRESS

ED. NOTE: *The following article was submitted to us following its rejection, for political reasons, by two other pyrotechnic publishers. As ever, The Case Former is happy to do its part for free expression. Great is the truth, and it shall prevail. For more on this subject, see this issue's "News from the Grapevine," by our own Migalucc.*

Is pyrotechny the only field which so neglects its debt to the amateur? The amateur – lover of the art, the discoverer, the innovator. And when the repression gets heavy and pros cower in silent fear of regulatory retribution should they protest, the bold voice of the amateur rings forth. Upon his death, I wrote an eulogy for Van (PGI founder Max P. VanderHorck) – the greatest of amateurs. The flight of the rocket my metaphor, I spoke of his pursuit of climactic beauty, not the golden fallout. And for his love of fireworks, and his service to others that love them, he shall be remembered after every giant of the industry is long forgotten. The future of fireworks lies in the unfettered hands and unspoken voice of the amateur.

Under tyrannical Mayor Giuliani, New York City residents are under unprecedented repression. In the guise of fighting crime, our freedoms have been trampled by his police state. Some atrocities have made headlines, others have been buried, in more ways than one. Even the most harmless of fireworks and the people that enjoy them have been made victims, as documented in my several past articles. As this despot aspires to the Presidency, many recognizing this danger are fearfully silent. But not amateurs, embracing liberty for the love of it, unenslaved by economic vulnerability and political obeisance.

To spread the word, I submitted my last article, "A Philadelphia Pilgrimage" to *The Phoenix* and two other pyro publications. I compliment *The Phoenix* as being the only amateur among these. The others refused to publish it without major revisions, and both for the same reason – FEAR of Herr Giuliani! Let's examine what one of these editors had to say in a FOREIGN (U.K.) magazine:

"The family fireworks industry in [S. Africa] has yet to learn that the most reliable method of staying in business is to NOT compromise with the people who are trying to put them out of business. Not an inch. Concessions, compromise, and signs of good faith are for wimps, not for survivors."

Tough talk, half a world away. But regarding my bold statement HERE IN AMERICA, this same editor told me that if I could "...keep the vituperation about the mayor to a minimum, I can come up with the space." Then, "I can give you one page, and the work would be subject to editing." And finally, "Howard, let's cut to the chase here. I make my liv-



*Miss Liberty, hemmed in by oppressive legislation on the right and academic nonsense on the left, beings to grow apprehensive...*

ing with [publication]. That's the bottom line. Maybe the hobby publishers or [the other publication] would be in a better position to carry it." The other publication's editor said, "...we attempt to avoid alienating anyone, especially political candidates. One never knows where Mayor Giuliani will end up." How true; I've been saying that all along. And should he become president, I predict A NATIONWIDE BAN ON ALL CONSUMER FIREWORKS!

The commercial-professional and pseudo-amateur fireworks press, though opposing the anti-fireworks media yellow press, has become YELLOW in quite a different sense! And the only fireworks activist group REALLY DOING SOMETHING beyond propitiating porcine politicos is the National Fireworks Association (NFA), now suing the CPSC. The rest have SOLD OUT!

I don't ask a stinking cent for my writings; I am proud to be an AMATEUR, independent, writing and fighting for freedom. How can ANY American not express "vituperation" at the heavy-handed actions of a freedom-stealing tyrant? This repression may not be where YOU live YET, but mark my words, should we fail in our duties to expose despotism and speak out for liberty no matter what the risks, we shall surely suffer greatly for it!

— HOWARD DAVIS



# TELLERINI'S CULINARY CORNER



*Science is a collection of successful recipes.*

—PAUL VALÉRY

This issue, another of our staff stands in for Mr. Tellerini with two recipes. The first is presented in recognition of the revived pyro-political career of Blombo lo Piombo, recently elected as Area Vice-President for Eastern and Foreign members in the Western Pyrotechnic Association (WPA). We trust that he will execute his duties with that courtesy, humility, flexibility, and responsiveness he obviously learnt in the paper-mill business and brought to his former post in the PGI.

Companions will no doubt recall Blombo's notorious invention of an electrically fired infernal device, charged with flash powder, to discourage squirrels from raiding his bird feeder. It is therefore in his honor that we present...

## SQUIRRELS IN MADEIRA

- 4 grey squirrels
- flour for dredging
- salt and pepper
- 5-6 tablespoons butter\*
- 1/2 lb. mushrooms, quartered
- 4 shallots, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 1 cup Madeira
- 2 cups stock
- 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped

Kill and dress four grey squirrels. We recommend a head-shot with your rook-and-rabbit rifle, as it is less destructive to the meat than a flash powder bomb *à la Blombo*; if the cussed things won't hold still long enough, this is one of the few justifications for the .410 shotshell loaded with No. 4 shot. Cut them into serving-size pieces. Season flour with salt and pepper to taste, and dredge the pieces in the seasoned flour.

Sauté the mushrooms and shallots in 3 tablespoons of the butter, and set aside. Brown the squirrels well with additional butter as needed, and set aside. Deglaze the pan with the Madeira (we recommend Leacock's Sercial, but any Madeira is good – its flavor will probably make up even for flash powder burns). Return the mushrooms, shallots, and squirrels to the pan, add the stock, bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for one hour. Then add the parsley, simmer for another 10 minutes (or until squirrels are tender) and serve.

\* In honor of Blombo's *embonpoint*!



Speaking of the WPA, those of you who didn't attend the 1998 Western Winter Blast should not suppose that those who did enjoyed a holiday in the warm sun. In fact it was cold and raw, and the proceedings were rained out on Saturday night. A nice hot drink of considerable alcoholic strength would have been most welcome in those dank and bone-chilling conditions. This alone would be reason enough to make...

## RACK PUNCH

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- zest of 1 large lemon
- 2 whole cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon whole coriander
- Juice of 2 large lemons
- 1 cup brandy
- 1 cup arrack (or 1 cup dark rum + 10 grains gum benzoin)
- 2 cups boiling water

Over medium heat mix the sugar in the 1/4 cup water till dissolved. Put the lemon zest and spices into a bowl and pour the resultant syrup over them and allow to steep for a few minutes. Add the lemon juice, brandy, and arrack, then the boiling water, stir well, and strain. The punch may be drunk hot, but any left over is also good cold.

Real Batavia arrack, a spirit distilled from fermented dates, is almost impossible to find. It must not be confused with the licorice-flavored *raki* popular in the Levant. We heed the advice of Mary Randolph in *The Virginia Housewife*, a cookbook of the last century, who advised that a decent simulacrum of arrack could be made by dissolving 2 scruples of benzoin in a quart of good rum; thus, 10 grains in a cup. See *The Case Former*, vol. IV, no. 1, pg. 16, on gum benzoin. We recommend Barrilito (Puerto Rico) or Barbancourt (Haiti) dark rums.

Rack punch was popular amongst our ancestors. One of our favorite politicians, that acid wit and *bon vivant*, John Randolph of Roanoke, spoke fondly of "the good old Virginia gentlemen on the assembly, drinking their twenty and forty bowls of rack punches, and madeira, and claret..." There is even a firework connection, since rack punch was a popular drink at Vauxhall, the famous pleasure garden described in Brock's *History of Fireworks*; readers of Thackeray will recall the plight of Jos. Sedley, in *Vanity Fair*, from overindulgence in rack punch at Vauxhall.

— ERNST PFANTODT

## THE ZIRCONIUM CONS-PEE-RACY

A few years ago while attending a mid-summer club shoot, I met an interesting fellow who worked in a government laboratory. I remember seeing him on a couple of occasions prior to this, and I was always intrigued by his knowledge and expertise in the pyrotechnic field. He and his partner always brought something interesting to the shoots, like the 100 pound rocket booster sunk head first into the ground. For nearly two minutes that thing roared and dug its way to China, leaving me almost deaf. On this day he didn't bring a rocket, but he brought some samples of various metals to test as fuels. Interested in his experiment, I told him I'd join him after I shot the few shells I brought.

I met up with him later by his car. He was mixing some minuscule batches of oxidizers and fuel. After testing each batch he logged each one into a little black book. Surrounded by a small group of on-lookers, some knowledgeable pyros and some not, an inebriated poor soul stepped to the forefront. On the ground were the smoldering remains of a zirconium/oxidizer composition. Still glowing an amber red, the dross produced would stay molten, most of us knew, for quite some time. Only the passage of time would cool the hot glob and any attempt to extinguish it, especially with a liquid, would be ill-advised.

Without so much as a warning, this gentleman moved over the smouldering pile, and in a heavy Southern drawl (accented more by all the Budweisers he drank) announced he was going to relieve himself. Within one second after he pulled down his zipper, a huge fire ball erupted into the air. The man whimpered, then ran off into the woods, all the while cursing and pouring beer on his burnt appendage. Roasted weenies anyone?

— CASIMIR SIMIENOWICZ, JR.



## EXPLOSIVES AND CRIME

ED. NOTE: *While The Case Former has in the past avoided confusion with Readers' Digest by refusing to reprint articles already published elsewhere, we note that a (supposedly) scholarly publication in this field now seems to run one or two reprint articles per issue. In order not to be left out of this latest trend, we thought that the following article, by the celebrated pyrotechnist Alan St. Hill Brock, might be of interest to our readers. It originally appeared in A Casebook of Crime (London, 1948), pp. 149-153.*

The employment of explosives for criminal purposes has generally been the work of political organisations, the Nihilists, the Fenians, the Anarchists and other of the same type. Since the time of Chevalier, for whom may be claimed the distinction of being the inventor of the first infernal machine, de-

signed to bring about the death of Napoleon I, many attempts, unsuccessful and successful, have been made on the lives of rulers and princes by means of explosives. The Fenian outrages of the 'eighties in this country were followed by the almost world-wide activities of the Anarchists and other terrorist organisations.

In 1913 comic relief was provided by the series of desperate attempts engineered by the "Suffragettes." In February a house built for Mr. Lloyd George at Walton-on-the-Hill, Surrey, was slightly damaged by the explosion of five pounds of gunpowder. In May a small charge, fitted with a crude attempt at an electrical firing device, was discovered under the Bishop's Throne at St. Paul's Cathedral. Had the igniting device functioned some damage might have been caused, but a similar result could hardly have been expected from the condensed milk can full of powder that was found against the wall of the Bank of England. In June a second explosion was actually achieved when a small quantity of gunpowder was fired under the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey, causing some slight injury to the woodwork. Then in December came the big effort; a rather larger quantity of powder than had been used before was exploded outside Holloway Gaol, where several of the sisterhood were then interned. The wall of the prison was discoloured.

The desperate attempt at Holloway Prison may have been inspired by the outrage for which Michael Barrett, the Fenian, was executed on May 26th, 1868, the last occasion of a public hanging in this country.\* In an attempt to liberate three prisoners in Clerkenwall Gaol, Barrett and his fellow conspirators exploded a barrel of gunpowder against the wall of the exercise yard. The attempt failed, but great damage was caused to surrounding property, while four persons were killed and ten times that number injured.

Apart from the use of explosives for political purposes, there have been many inspired by other motives, some of which are of such an extraordinary nature as to be comic, were it not for the terrible results achieved.

There is the case of Billon, the clockmaker of Senlis, a country town twenty miles distant from Paris. Sunday, December 13th, 1789, had been fixed for the ceremony of blessing the standards of the newly formed militia. A procession composed of a detachment of National Cavalry, le Corps de l'Arquebus, le Corps de l'Arc, local officials and various societies of the town had formed up outside the Hotel de Ville, preparatory to marching to the Cathedral, when Billon approached the officer commanding the cavalry with a request that the route of the procession be altered so that it should pass by the front of his house. On being told that this was im-

\* i.e., Great Britain (ed.) The last in the U.S. was in 1936, in Kentucky.



possible he expostulated violently and went home.

The procession moved off and had reached a point where it could be seen from the house of the clockmaker, although not so well as would have been the case had his request been complied with, when a shot rang out and a drummer at the head of the procession fell, shot through the head. Another shot followed and another of the company fell riddled with buck shot. Then followed a steady fusillade from an upper window of Billon's house. A stampede followed, while some of the cooler heads took cover and returned the fire. Others rushed forward and broke in the house door with the butts of their muskets. Gaining the upper floor they found the door of the room from which Billon was firing locked and barricaded. At last an entrance was forced, when it was seen that a heap of material in the centre of the room was on fire, and messages were dispatched for the fire brigade. While the attackers were awaiting their arrival, Billon, having shot down one and felled another with a blow from his pistol butt, dashed out of the door and upstairs to the attic.

It was now found that the burning material covered a large metal box, which, for some reason that is left obscure by the contemporary account, the discoverer decided contained gunpowder. Shouting and waving to his companions he dashed downstairs and into the street, with the intention, as he afterwards explained, of expediting the arrival of the fire brigade. His intuition, however, was not at fault, for shortly afterwards, just as Lieutenant de la Bruyere, of the mounted police was seizing the assassin, the powder exploded, bringing down the house in ruins.

Bruyere and his prisoner were surprisingly taken alive from the ruins. The former to live to enjoy for many years a pension of eighteen hundred livres, the latter to have his brains battered out by the musket-butts of the militiamen. In all, twenty-five persons met their deaths and forty-one more were wounded because the clockmaker resented his expulsion from the Corps de l'Arquebus.

Another diabolical crime by which over one hundred were killed was that perpetrated by William King Thomson, at Bremerhaven in 1875. Thomson, a native of Brooklyn, conceived the idea of dispatching a parcel by the S.S. "Mosel," effecting insurance in it, sinking the ship with an infernal machine and claiming the insurance money.

The explosives were to be enclosed in a separate parcel consigned under a false name in the vessel's hold. This was duly dispatched from Bremen to Bremerhaven, was being unloaded from the guards van of the train when it exploded. Thomson, who had already boarded the vessel with the intention of handing his insured parcel to the purser, and of obtaining a receipt for it, was found in a cabin bleeding from self-inflicted revolver wounds, from which he died five days later. The amount he hoped to receive from the transaction was £450.

In 1911, a man living at Haverfordwest, who be-

came jealous of his wife, exploded a stick of gelignite in the bedroom. The couple and their child were killed instantly. At the coroner's inquest the jury found that the wife and child had been murdered by the husband, in whose case an open verdict was recorded, as they took the view that it was impossible to say that he intended to kill himself.

At Seattle, in 1889, a man named Schaffer, who had been imprisoned for an assault on the wife of a man named Boydola, on his release blew up Boydola's house with dynamite, killing the entire family as well as two employees. Schaffer was lynched before he could be arrested.

There have been two cases of hotel customers, who have been refused drinks, expressing their sense of grievance by attempting to blow up the premises. The first was at Brynccelthyn, near Bridgend, in 1894, when £300 worth of damage was done; the second at Cross Keys in 1913.

Eleven years earlier, one McKee practically destroyed a Washington hotel because he was dissatisfied with the service. Fortunately McKee was the only person killed.

Cases of the use of explosives in bulk as an alternative to demanding money at the point of the pistol have not been infrequent. In December, 1891, two men named Lord and Wilson entered the Broadway office of Russell Sage, a well-known New York business man, and demanded a million dollars under threat of blowing up the building. Sage, thinking they were madmen, tried to humour them as he edged his way towards the door. A bomb was then produced by one of the intruders who threw it across the office, where it exploded with terrific force, killing five, including Lord. His partner and several others received serious injuries.

During the 'nineties train robberies were frequent in the United States, Generally the track was dynamited, or other measures were found to bring the train to a standstill, and after blowing open the safe of the express car the robbers decamped with its contents. In one case the booty amounted to \$50,000; a more satisfactory result than that achieved by the robbers who wrecked a goods train on the Delaware Railroad in 1903, killing the entire train's crew and destroying fifteen waggons. The sum realised amounted to two and a half dollars a head.

Two terrible train wrecks in 1931 were the work of a Hungarian merchant, named Sylvester Matuska. The first, at Juellerboy, was, as he confessed when arrested, in the nature of an experiment. Several coaches overturned and rolled down an embankment, with the result that seventy-five persons were injured, although fortunately none was killed. A month later he exploded an infernal machine under the Constantinople-Cologne Express at Bia Torbagy, in Hungary. The coaches plunged down an embankment 150 ft. high, killing twenty-five passengers.

Having witnessed the result of his effort, Matuska scratched his face with a knife and laid down



among the wounded. After he had received treatment he was given a ticket to his home in Vienna and later started a suit to recover damages from the railway company. Grilled by the Viennese police, he confessed to two previous attempts at train wrecking and expressed his intention of continuing his work. The reason he gave for his actions was that he had been appointed "to punish the world for its materialism and then to save it."

Suicides by means of explosives have been many. There was the case of the miner at Rothbury who lighted the fuze of a dynamite cartridge, placed it in the dent of his soft felt hat and stood to attention until it exploded.

Instances of suicides filling their mouths with gunpowder and applying a light are many, but surely the most spectacular effort is that conducted by a Portuguese officer in 1890, who, as a protest at what he considered unjust treatment, secured fourteen barrels of gunpowder, built them into a pyramid and seating himself on the summit, wrapped in his national flag, exploded the whole.

— ALAN ST. HILL BROCK



## WAY OFF THE INTERNET

*They battle, they battle – poor put-upon cattle  
Each waging, reluctantly,  
That punitive war on the disagreeor  
Which falls to the disagreeee.*

— GEORGE STARBUCK, *Desperate Measures*

The Editor of this department of *The Case Former* recently received the following complaint about what its author considers on-line imitations of his writing style. For the edification of all, we reprint it as received:

\* \* \* \* \*

for some time now i've been putting up with you internet people copying my literary style. i spoke to my agent don marquis about it but he says there isnt much the law could do for me. even so it's really bad manners to mock me just because i'm a cockroach and can only hit one key at a time, and never passed english class. my friend mehitabel says, well, some people have the brains of a cockroach but you know how cats always think they're so superior. you humans have cerebrums and ten fingers each and i think you're just making fun of a poor little roach. we insects have enough trouble dodging real webs without having to put up with phony ones. i have been trying to quietly make some waves, but i guess its time to get loud.

archy <archy@roachhotel.com>  
<http://www.roachhotel.com>

## CYBERPYROPHORIA

Oh era of the cybergeek reign forth  
Your fluffy glory seek by day or night assailing forth  
Twill puke great fires in my port.  
The ghosts of hundreds lure NET souls  
To lead in triumph o'er their foes  
Through quarrels of netkeystrokes blare  
No truth transforming on the air  
Cast forth their warnings Chlorate's end  
Like blissful mornings they'll defend.

These do-good perils of the wire  
Doth lead me through the Krank quagmire  
Told true in form but most desire  
The hands who teach know well the liar.

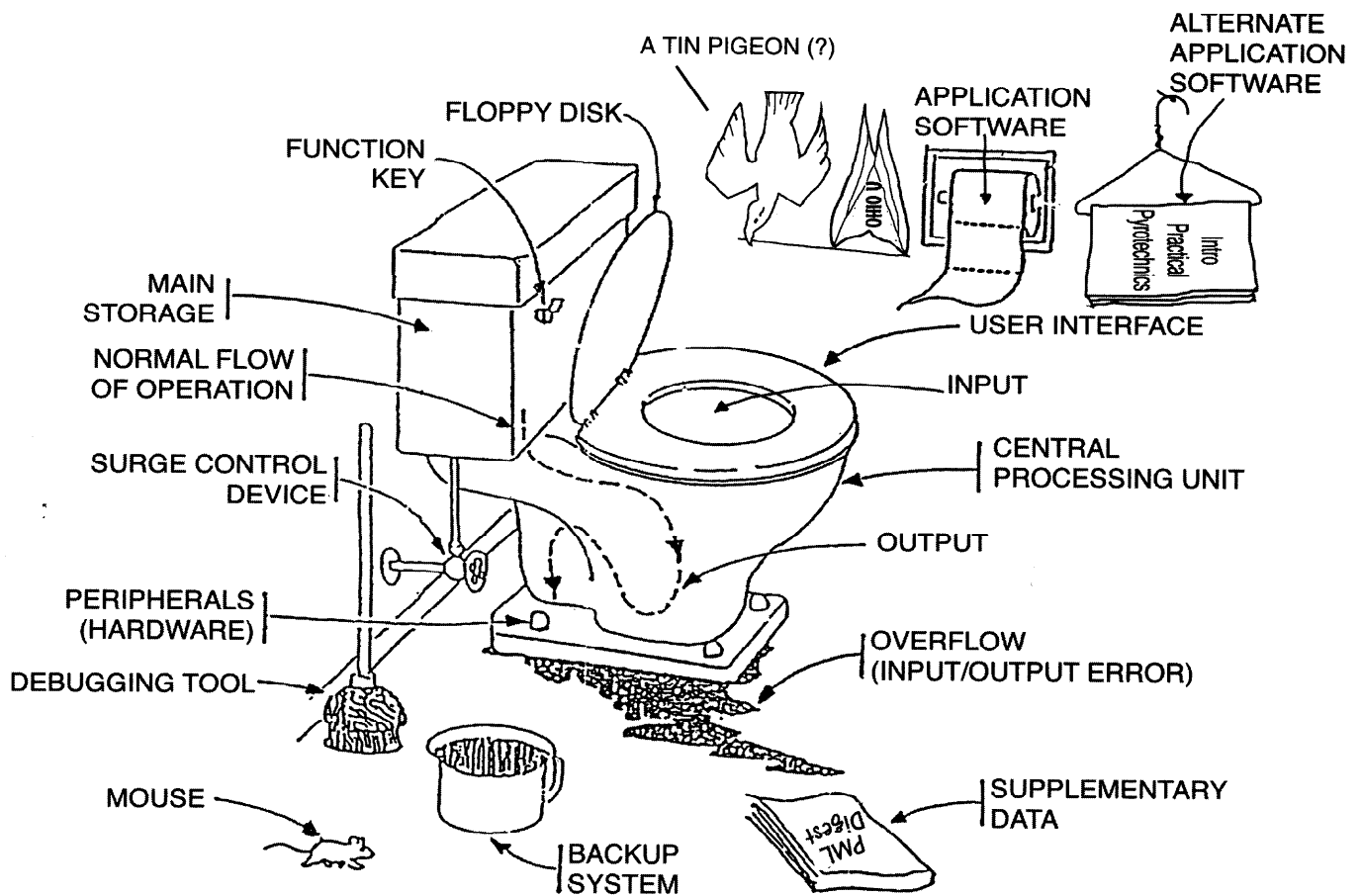
Gird your breasts with words of steel  
For Murr-Murr's cyber-portal-wheel  
But say not now your scorn for thee  
Whose nest of pigeons flock freely.  
All saints in copper claded groins  
With Netscape's sword and iron loins  
Come near me not you usenet whore  
'Cause PML hath ruled once more.  
My words of ink are here not known  
just 'lectron vivid virtual blown  
Though through the box of floppy talk  
Compose big words of wordy talk  
And wonder if they'll ever know  
The foolish fools of cybershow.

But brace yourselves now don't you dare  
Cross Booodah's path on cybersphere  
'Cause if you do and Orfca too  
Then be forewarned by Sleazely you:  
I told you not to air your views  
Of matters known to me but few  
And since thou didst not speak for me  
I'll see you through demise for thee."

All well I hear and read I swear  
From Cyber world C-RAP shells near  
But those who perish from their work  
Of past traditions lawyers lurk  
And who but Krank and Wheazel too  
Will shank the courts with worthless do.

My time hath come, my time hath come  
I smoke on usenet just for phun  
And when I puff the words for me  
My soul doth flee great miles from me.  
I am my cloak of nameless calls  
And word-less works of plight-full falls  
But fret not one big tear for me  
'Cause I can fend them gracefully.

Euphoric talk on data lines  
Burn worthless works in young school minds  
Like acid trips in wishing wells  
These anxious kids cast in their spells.  
All talk is cheap - opinions too  
And many come and many do  
But when they rail on "me-too" talk  
I want to hurl but only bock.



Oh learned ones in cyberland  
 Take newbies on with guiding hand  
 Through dangerous paths they do abound  
 And speaketh forth with great resound.  
 I often wonder in my day  
 How readers dumb can be as they  
 And then I ponder all its worth  
 And see no interest in its girth.  
 It's time to go my merry way  
 Whilst cyberpyrophoria yea  
 And when I go to school next term  
 I'm sure to make them shriek and squirm.  
 Now wish me well and praise my name  
 For cyberpyrophoric fame  
 But keep your back front facing rear  
 'Cause good ole folks will knife you there.

— VIVALIBERE O. MUORI

## THE REGULATORY RIGADOON

Does your profit rate  
     make you damn your fate,  
 Have your products fallen from favor?  
 If without deceit  
     you can't compete  
 You yet may victory savor;  
 Defeat your foes,  
     and augment their woes  
 No matter how hard they may labor;  
 Collaborate  
     when they regulate,  
 And you'll beggar (nay, bugger) thy neighbor!

— MERCURIO DOLCE

## Profiles in Progress

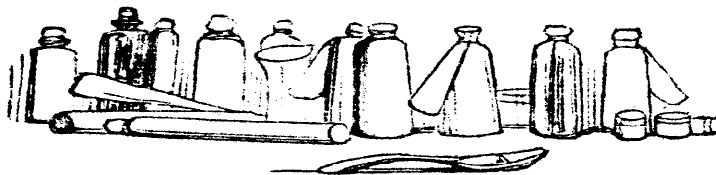
- Shotshell wads, which used to be biodegradable fiber, now linger in the field for years!
- Hospitals discard barrels full of waste every day, instead of re-sterilizing glass syringes and steel instruments!
- When you buy a new car, the interior furnishings will probably warp and crack before that special aroma is gone!
- Every oil change generates five pieces of enduring litter where there used to be easily incinerated cardboard!
- And now... there are firework mortars which are easy to carry, but unlikely to withstand any cylinder shell worth shooting. Ideally, they are used with modern K-RAP shells, which upon bursting strew the landscape with sharp fragments, ideally constituted to interact with barefooted children, to the enormous increase in physicians' revenues from minor stitching jobs and tetanus shots!

(A public service message, brought to you by the American Association for the Promotion of Tacky Environmental Pollutants as Structural Materials, through the generous support of Charlatan Wheeze Enterprises, Inc.)

**ALL BECAUSE OF A MATERIAL WE  
 CALL F!&%\$¢ \* DOG@%#@# PLASTIC!**



# Galinitropyromedica



This time we take a brief look at the non-metals, and a few simple compounds containing them. Our list does not pretend to be comprehensive, due to limited space and to the fact that most of these drugs have only minor usefulness in in pyrotechny. (A few such as charcoal and sulfur are essential in pyrotechny but they have limited usefulness in medicine.) It is worth noting that some chemists consider antimony and arsenic "metalloids", something very close to the non-metals. This view has some merit considering the odd compounds they form, viz. the sodium meta-antimoniate endorsed by Weingart for yellow stars, or the gallium arsenide used in electronic devices. However, to this author antimony and arsenic are metals, arsenic in particular being so useful that it deserves a column all to itself at the end of our series.

Cyanides and complex cyanides, while used only occasionally, deserve a passing mention. The simple cyanides are not seen in fireworks, because they are toxic and are not very stable in moist air. But they are certainly combustible in the presence of oxidizers, and could be used in an improvised explosive if nothing else were available. The rapid action of fatal doses of cyanide is well known, and is due to the poison's effect on respiration and nerve centers. Less well known in this safety-faking age is the fact that small doses are useful medications and rarely have unpleasant side effects. Unlike the heavy metals, cyanide ion doesn't accumulate in the tissues; doses not large enough to kill are soon eliminated. Prussic acid or free cyanide is especially useful as a sedative in cough and gastric irritation. A diluted acid, 2% strength, was once official; the usual dose was 1 to 3 minims or 0.06 to 0.18 cc. A more common way to administer cyanide, especially today, is by taking advantage of botanicals which contain cyanogenic glycosides. There are many such plants and the best choice depends partly on geography; in Europe cherry-laurel water is the traditional choice, but in the U.S. we prefer the bark of wild cherry, *Prunus virginiana*. The usual preparation is a syrup made from this bark, which should never be confused with ordinary cherry syrup made from fruit. At least one of the large drug companies still sells *Syr. Prun. Virg.* but they intend it only as a vehicle for more trendy drugs; it has obviously been boiled and while it contains more tannin than a young claret it has little if any prussic acid. Properly made at

home from reasonably fresh bark and cool water, this syrup is in a different league: a sample which has been in the author's refrigerator for at least five years still has a strong smell of bitter almond. Aside from its value in combinations, a tablespoonful all by itself is just the thing for a dry cough – yet one would need a glassful to be at risk for poisoning. This would be a good choice of cough suppressant for a narcotic abuser, since he obviously would not develop a cyanide habit, at least not for long. Some health-food stores carry a decent grade of wild cherry bark, and we must wonder how many of the granola crowd who talk of harmless herbs consider that they are taking one of the deadliest inorganic poisons.

The red and yellow prussiates of potash which are sometimes seen in pyrotechny are apparently valueless in medicine; the British *Extra Pharmacopœia* says the ferrocyanide is "physiologically almost without action". However, the same reference claims the soluble thiocyanates lower blood pressure and may also be useful in nervous disorders and some types of pain. Apparently this was a short-lived fashion just before World War II. It certainly does not have a long enough history to rank with the real classics, while we never hear of it today even from the fringe medical types. However, it is interesting to note that another complex cyanide, the nitroprusside of sodium, is still in widespread use today for reducing high blood pressure. It is not given to outpatients, because of the short duration of action and the danger involved in an overdose. But it is given intravenously to people who have severe, acute cases of hypertension, and practically every hospital stocks it. It is also available in crystal form from chemical suppliers, and aside from its relatively high cost there is no reason why it could not be used in co-precipitates and other specialized compositions.

*Sulphur* acts as mild laxative when taken internally, a typical dose being 15 to 60 grains. Most of this remains unchanged, but a small percentage is converted to compounds which enter the circulation, causing  $H_2S$  to be excreted from the skin and lungs. It has given good results when taken orally for chronic eczema. Sulphur has also been administered for a wide variety of other conditions raging from bronchitis to chronic rheumatism, but in most of these its value is doubtful. Many sulphurous springs do seem to benefit rheumatism, but it is not certain whether this is due to the sulphur, to other miner-

als, or simply to the long immersion in hot water. Fifteen or twenty years ago there was a minor fashion for taking sulphur capsules as a mosquito repellent – we remember reading this in one of the popular outdoor magazines.

Externally, sulphur is usually employed as a 10% ointment, although practically any strength is safe to try. It is useful in many skin diseases, especially scabies and acne, although of course it is unfashionable these days because it is greasy and smelly. The unpleasantness can be reduced by applying it at night, sleeping in soft flannel, and washing the area in the morning. It is very inexpensive and about as safe as any drug product can be, so those who actually pay for their medications may still find it useful.

*Charcoal* remains popular as a non-specific treatment for poisoning: it binds a remarkable variety of organic compounds ranging from natural alkaloids to recent synthetic drugs. It has also been reported to absorb some inorganic toxins, including permanganate, iodine, and corrosive sublimate. The same property applied to bacterial toxins would explain its occasional use in poultices for infected wounds. Aside from its value in emergencies, charcoal is sometimes used in simple indigestion. The author's family once owned a Labrador retriever who had truly atrocious eating habits even by the standards of his breed. After gorging on week-old fish from the lakeshore, frostbitten tomatoes, and overripe cucumbers, even this dog would sometimes regret his gluttony. He would then retire to the woodpile and dine blissfully on charred cottonwood bark until his tongue matched his coat. As he discovered, almost any type of charcoal works, but the usual choice is "activated" charcoal, made more absorptive by treatment with steam. The activated type also gives superior results in some firework compositions, notably chlorate and perchlorate shell bursting mixtures which lack sulphur.

The recent work by Jennings-White and Wilson (in *PYROTECHNICA* • XVII) includes a pyrotechnic use for chloroform. Some of the safety-fakery involving this drug has already been mentioned in *The Case Former*, and we lack the space for a lengthy discussion here. It is worth noting that ethyl ether is still about the safest general anæsthetic, as far as toxicity to the patient is concerned, and it is also an excellent muscle relaxant which usually obviates the need for curare-type drugs. Unfortunately the extremely flammable vapor is a hazard in its own right, especially with all the electrical gadgets found in a typical modern surgery. Ether also has stimulant effects in the early stages and takes a long time to produce deep anæsthesia; this is why we have heard of "ether frolics" but never "chloroform frolics". The chlorinated anæsthetics, old or new, are non-flammable and offer a much shorter induction period, although not quite as short as we see in the movies. Chloroform water, 1:400 strength, was once popular as a vehicle for drugs with a nauseating taste. The lozenges

called simply "Throat Discs" originally contained chloroform, but whether due to safety-faking or merely to a change in the manufacturer, they have lost what was probably their most active, and certainly their most distinctive ingredient. The author saw chloroform in a commercial brand of toothache drops only a few years ago, but times being what they are this has probably been changed as well. One useful preparation is the old *Linimentum Chloroformi* of the U.S.P., something else which is now a home-brew proposition. It is made by mixing three volumes of chloroform with seven of camphor and soap limiment. If covered with bandages chloroform can be irritating to the skin and may even produce blisters, but when applied uncovered this problem does not arise, and the liniment is especially useful in neuralgic conditions. Finally in this safety-faking age we should ponder the fact that it was not very long ago one could buy "Chloroform Anodyne" or simply "Chlorodyne", an elixir used for severe pain and gastric disturbances in both humans and animals. Receipts varied slightly, but it always contained chloroform, morphine, hydrocyanic acid (q.v.) and cannabis!

Although it may be stretching our theme of simple compounds, we feel compelled to mention quinine hydrochloride, which was listed as an ingredient of color compositions by Websky in 1846. Its chlorine content is low, and it is less efficient for this purpose than something like saran or hexachlorobenzene. Still, this appears to be the first documented use of an organic chlorine donor, back in the days when calomel (which should never be confused with corrosive sublimate) was sold in every corner pharmacy.

*Boric acid* was also used by Websky, in a green fire composition which included three other medicaments, zinc oxide plus the dreaded chlorate and sulphur. It is still occasionally used for flame coloration, although its main firework use today is as a buffer to protect aluminum. Boric acid and some of its compounds are mild antiseptics with a long and mostly favorable history of medicinal usage. They were never considered "miracle drugs" but this helped them escape most of the faddishness which goes with miracles. Doses of 5 to 15 grains may be taken with safety, although boric acid is of little use internally except in certain cases of cystitis. As a glycerite it may be used in ear infections, while pessaries of boric acid are occasionally still made and can be effective where more stylish anti-infectives fail. Boric acid is most popular for minor inflammations of the eyes; a commercial ophthalmic ointment was available until about five years ago. This is yet another drug which has come under attack from the safety-fakers. There have been a few cases of poisoning (and how few it takes!) due to heavy-handed usage such as sprinkling an infant's entire body with boric acid. In the case of ophthalmics, the good folks who watch over us are worried about bacterial contamination rather than boron toxicity. Thus we have the odd

situation that boric acid is still sold in most drug-stores, but bears no directions for medicinal use. However, anyone who can boil water can make a useful eyewash solution of about 2% strength. Saturation at room temperature is less than 4%, so it is difficult to make it too concentrated, while the problem of contamination is solved by scalding the containers and making fresh solution every day. If there is no benefit after a day or two, using it every few hours, it is time to try something else. A wide variety of preparations has also been used on the skin, the most interesting from our vantage point being a British powder composed of equal parts of boric acid, bismuth subnitrate, and calomel.

This is as good a place as any to observe that an antibiotic, properly speaking, is a substance produced by a *micro-organism* which inhibits or kills other microbes. Compounds produced by higher plants, such as quinine or echinacoside, are not true antibiotics, and inorganic substances are certainly not antibiotics. Unfortunately the word has acquired such a *cachet* that most laymen, and all too many physicians, cannot look at any kind of infectious condition without thinking "antibiotic" – even in cases where the cost or shortcomings of the modern drugs has led to a revival of the old ones! Thus we see things like bismuth salts and colloidal silver being called "antibiotics", not only in sources which can't be taken seriously, but sometimes in recognized medical literature. It is hard to say whether this is pure carelessness or a misguided attempt to put a trendy spin on these old diehards, which don't need that sort of help.

Ammonium chloride (sal ammoniac) finds occasional use as a chlorine donor, although its main pyrotechnic value is in smoke compositions. It was once popular as an inhalation in laryngitis, salpingitis and similar conditions. Even when given orally it is a fairly good saline expectorant, thinning the lung mucus to benefit such ailments as chronic bronchitis. It is a mild diuretic but there are many better ones; the distinctive property of  $\text{NH}_4\text{Cl}$  is that it acidifies the urine. This increases the effectiveness of some anti-infective drugs, and also speeds the elimination of many alkaline drugs from the bloodstream. The oral dose varies from 5 to 60 grains; it may be given in capsules, or the unpleasant taste can be masked with licorice or fruit-flavored syrups. Plenty of water is advised especially with the larger doses or frequent intervals.

Hexamethylene tetramine, called hexamine or methenamine, is a good antiseptic in the urinary tract. It works best in acidic urine, which causes the drug to break down and release formaldehyde; sodium acid phosphate can be given to promote this but in the firework shop we would choose sal ammoniac (above). Methenamine is of course not trendy or profitable and is no longer promoted by the salesmen, but it is still sold by drug companies as tablets made from the hippurate or mandelate salt. Indeed,

for chronic U.T.I. it is a better choice than antibiotics, because bacteria don't develop resistance, and it works in most acute cases too. An appropriate dose is 10 to 30 grains four times daily with plenty of water.

Finally we come to phosphorus, the purported use of which in small novelty fireworks has once again provoked a controversy. Most substances regarded as poisons vary greatly in their effects, depending on the form in which they are administered, and on whether the exposure is long-term or a single large dose. This is especially true of phosphorus: in an oxidized state quite large amounts can safely be ingested, phosphate being an essential nutrient, while certain soft drinks contain phosphoric acid. The red amorphous form of the element has little effect in any quantity which is likely to be swallowed. But there is no denying that white or yellow phosphorus is highly toxic. Long-term exposure to its vapors causes the notorious "phossy jaw", a necrosis of the mandibles and adjoining bones, which is why it was banned in the manufacture of matches. One grain of phosphorus, or even less in some individuals, will cause acute poisoning if taken orally. The first symptoms are severe abdominal pain and vomiting; doses of sixteen grains or more have been survived because of this defensive response. Certain antidotes may neutralize the threat if administered soon enough; these include permanganate of potash (q.v.), oil of turpentine, and copper sulphate, which will be discussed in another column. Once the phosphorus has entered the bloodstream there is not much that can be done except to treat the symptoms. Rapid, feeble pulse, a garlicky odor on the breath, and sometimes luminous urine are seen at this stage. If the patient survives the first few hours he may appear to recover, but is likely to have serious liver toxicity in three or four days, with the usual complications of damage to that organ.

Phosphorus was formerly sold in commercial rodent baits (rats can't vomit), and these were occasionally used in criminal poisoning, although the vile taste and easy detection probably helped keep such misuse from being common. Both the rat pastes and white phosphorus "spit devils" will certainly poison a child who eats them – but we feel there is a social or cultural problem involved here which is rarely mentioned in the endless clamor over banning dangerous objects. Similar logic has been applied to everything from handguns to airplane glue, but it is interesting to note that such thinking did not carry much political weight until the "progressive" era. Phosphorus products got the axe in that thoroughly modern decade, the 1920s, while anti-fireworks campaigns in general reached a fever pitch in the '60s. At first glance it seems bizarre that periods regarded as politically *liberal* should result in *less* personal freedom, yet this is the usual pattern in the twentieth century. Can it be coincidence that the era from the first World War to the 'thirties, and later

the 'sixties and 'seventies, were times of radical feminism when women were actively encouraged to seek careers outside the home? Accidents happen even in well-ordered households, but are far more likely where there is no clear chain of authority in the home and where the kiddies may spend hours without either parent around to supervise them.

Phosphates are rather inert substances which are not used in pyrotechny, but the almost forgotten hypophosphite salts deserve a mention. In the early part of this century these were promoted as nutritive tonics for the nervous system in wasting diseases such as tuberculosis. Effectiveness was never proven, but because of this widespread fashion one may still find the odd bottle of sodium, potassium, calcium, ferric or even manganese hypophosphite, which were probably never manufactured except for drug use. These in turn may be used to make hypophosphites of heavy metals such as lead by the simple double-displacement reaction. As one would expect these are very reactive with chlorates, since they represent phosphorus which is only partly oxidized. It is doubtful that these compounds would be a good choice for large display fireworks, but they clearly have potential in specialized mixtures such as priming compositions.

Since the mid-eighteenth century, white phosphorus itself has seen extensive use as a medicine, although needless to say the dose must be very small. About 1/100 grain or 0.65mg at one time is enough, and the French Codex recommends a maximum of 1/32 grain (2mg) daily. It should always be given in solution, although this solution can be made into a capsule or a pill. Almond oil will dissolve a convenient 1%, so that a dose of one minim (0.06cc) contains just the right amount of phosphorus. It has been used in many disorders, and some of its effects, notably its reputation as an aphrodisiac, are subjective and difficult to prove. Others are definite, such as the stimulating effect on the circulation which once made it popular in asthenic fevers. The most distinctive and useful property of phosphorus is that it stimulates bone growth, making the spongy tissue thicker and the compact tissue more dense; thus it has been given to heal ununited fractures. We may safely assume that it would be most beneficial in *deficiency of backbone*, a condition which may strike any of us from time to time, but which is truly endemic among our public officials. It is just possible that they ought to be *dosing* themselves with white phosphorus, instead of trying to take everybody else's away. Indeed the occasional fragment of a pyrotechnic "devil" might help them spit fire in the right direction, while tea made from a "twig bang" could keep them from being straws in the wind. Our only concern is that the other effect of phosphorus might help breed more of them, but that is a trend which never seems to change, no matter what we do.

— S. DULCAMARA

## SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

*News Notes From All Around*

Fireworks references occur in all sorts of unexpected places. Who would have imagined one in a book about wine? But here it is – from H. Warner Allen's *The Romance of Wine* (New York, 1932), in the chapter headed "Port, the Wine of Philosophy":

These indefatigable people can do nothing without deafening noise. There is a certain savage fascination about the beating of a distant drum on a hot night, but I can find no good word to say for the Portuguese passion for dynamite rockets, abominable instruments of torture. They are simply rockets with one or two sticks of dynamite attached, and the dynamite is supposed to go off in the air with a terrific explosion, but explosions are sometimes premature and sometimes delayed till the stick falls. I am assured that the rocket death-roll in Northern Portugal does not exceed a hundred a year, a mere trifle in these days of motor cars, but I am convinced that the figures must be much larger. When the Portuguese are really enjoying themselves, they sing and dance to a noise resembling that of a heavy bombardment, and in a festival in the mountains at Amarante I was completely deafened by the unceasing roar of about sixty sheepskin drums beaten furiously, broken by violent dynamite explosions.

Mr. Allen seems to have had an aversion to any noise louder than the popping of a champagne cork, and on this point we obviously disagree with him. Do the Portuguese still celebrate the vintage with dynamite rockets? Does anybody know? If so, we at the *Case-Former* would welcome hearing from him.

The recent spate of tell-all books about the British royals have, in general, aroused in us an equanimity bordering upon indifference. Our attention was, however, drawn to the following passage from Stephen Barry's *Royal Service* (1983):

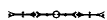
There is one custom the Royal family share that few people know about. Every year when we were on the Royal yacht, we would anchor for the day off the coast near the Queen Mother's tiny Castle of May. This is a very comfortable home in spite of its rather grim medieval look. The gardens were all made ready by the Queen Mother's gardeners for her August visit, and we arrived in time for a very good lunch. Everyone was encouraged to wander through the grounds before tea was served and then back to the yacht by launch before sailing to Aberdeen.

As we steamed away the Queen Mother always sent up big rockets from the turrets of her castle for a dramatic farewell, and her staff would wave big sheets from the battlements. In return, the *Britannia* would send up flares, scorching streaks of light into the sky. Unfortunately, being Scotland, some summers were rainy and foggy so we couldn't see the Queen Mother's fireworks nor she ours. But we could all hear the bangs and crashes as they exploded into the damp sky.

Set as it is in the far north of Scotland, the Castle was too far from anywhere for anyone else to enjoy our firework display. This, therefore, became a very private little

ceremony, and one which signaled the end of the working year and the start of the much anticipated summer holiday.

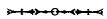
We always thought H.M. the Queen Mother brought a bit of Scottish vigor into the otherwise dull Gaelic tribe that occupies the British throne, and are gratified to hear that she likes big rockets, bangs and crashes. Here's to her!



Regular readers of these pages will recall a notice that appeared under this heading in a previous issue (Vol. III, No. 3, December 1996) regarding a proposal published in the *Journal of Pyrotechnics* advocating the use of phenolphthalein in rocket compositions. As the original author of this proposal never bothered to try it in an actual rocket, basing his predictions only on some sort of computer modelling, it fell to our intrepid correspondent T. Babington Brimstone to put the idea to an empirical test, with results reported in the same issue.

We wish to note, for the record, that phenolphthalein has now been deemed a carcinogen by the FDA, and ordered removed from such patent medicines as Ex-Lax, in which it featured for years as the active ingredient. We are somewhat mystified as to how the FDA determined its carcinogenicity, since it is hard to imagine, in the case of this compound, how laboratory rats could survive the usual regular mega-doses administered in carcinogenicity testing, long enough to contract cancer.

Nevertheless we expect to see a retraction in the *JoP*, anathematizing this substance with all the hysteria mustered by such eminent safety-fakers, and consigning it to exile along with realgar, Paris green, and (*gasp!*) chlorate of potash. It would almost make you want to go out and get some, if it had actually ever worked as a pyrotechnic ingredient.



The following, noted in *The Field* for February, 1998, points out the remarkable variety of uses to which pyrotechnic compositions may be put:

Fuses for Bolting Bears: sulphur, 18 oz.; nitre, 15 oz.; pitch, 6 oz.; resin, 3 oz.; mealed gunpowder, 3 oz.; powdered (*sic*) pitch, and resin, and melt gently over the fire; take off, mix with the coal (*sic*), and when "stiffish" add gunpowder; knead mixture, and make into balls. The quantity makes about four balls for bears. Get a tin tube, and cut it into sections, which makes the stuff handy to carry; but small balls about the size of a pea would do for rabbits. Some add a little cayenne pepper which is an admirable addition. (From *Facts & Useful Hints Relating to Fishing and Shooting*, 1874)

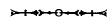
A ball of this composition (here called a "fuse" in the manner of Thomas Kentish) was evidently to have been lighted, and tossed into the lair of the animal, whether bear or rabbit, in order to smoke it out and permit the hunter to give chase.

Somewhat along the same lines, in his pioneering pamphlet *Feux d'artifice siffnants* (1888), Amédée Denisse notes the application of pyrotechnic whistles

to fox hunting. He points out that hunters make use of asphyxiating smokes to drive foxes, rabbits, "et autres animaux nuisibles" from their burrows; and when the beast is not asleep it will hasten to escape the suffocating action of the smoke. However, if the deleterious vapors surprise the animal while it is sleeping, it may succumb, asphyxiated in its lair, without profit for the hunter. Here he suggests that a simple whistling serpent will have its use: its piercing noise will awaken the animal, which, terrified, will decamp the more speedily.

Not to omit the vegetable kingdom, we note the following suggestion made by Louis Fieser, inventor of Napalm, in a discussion of its household employments found on p. 201 of his immortal volume *The Scientific Method* (1964):

Napalm gel has a peacetime use: eradication of crabgrass. In late August, when crabgrass begins to bear seeds, mowing is suspended for a few weeks to let the seeds accumulate. A thin Napalm gel is prepared in a glass jar with a screw cap punched with holes. Strands of gel are then laid over the grass, a small section being treated at a time. With an extinguisher in one hand, the operator tosses in a match with the other hand. The ugly seeds are completely destroyed. So is the grass; the lawn is initially black. But roots of the grass are not damaged and the first rain brings out a green, crabgrass-free lawn.



One of the things we actually have to admit reading on the PMS – whoops, make that PML – was a report that the police chief of Madison, Wisconsin, someone called Richard Williams, recently had a mishap with his new Glock semi-auto pistol. It appears that he forgot that he hid it in the oven of his gas stove. Having put a turkey in to roast, his memory was jogged when a round cooked off.

When last we looked the ponderous dunces on the 'Net were debating how this could possibly happen – what was the initiation temperature of pistol primers, smokeless powder, etc. This is less intriguing to us than why the chief put his pistol in the oven to begin with, or why he was so absent-minded as to forget what he had done with it. How is a cop to "protect and serve" the public, when his pistol is in the stove?

We have heard too many contrary anecdotes to have much faith in the proficiency of the average police officer with firearms. There are regular reports in the press of appalling marksmanship, where dozens of rounds have been discharged by cops and crooks alike without a single one having effect. Many accidents have resulted from the unfamiliar mechanics of self-loading pistols, newly issued to policemen used to their old service revolvers. Our correspondent *il dottore* Dulcamara (himself a graceful and accomplished shot at moving targets with everything from .22 to 4-bore) reported two to us that happened within days after the new weapons were issued in his community. One officer managed to put a hole through the door of his squad car, incidentally blow-

ing off one of his fingers, whilst the other wounded himself in the buttock. We have seen a new concealed carry holster advertised that is designed to fit in the waistband of a pair of trousers, just behind the fly. This may lend new credence to Mae West's celebrated greeting line, but we also cringe to contemplate the consequences of its use by policemen. "Not a happy lot," indeed... especially when sung by an *haut-contre*, suffering a condition inalterable by Viagra.

Putting a pistol in the oven, however, represents a new nadir. Part of the explanation may lie in Madison's reputation as a throwback to the 'sixties, a hotbed of the loony and loopy left. Since the office of chief of police is usually a political appointment we might expect that Mr. Williams is a product of that type of thinking. We shouldn't expect a Bill Jordan or a Skeeter Skelton out of Madison.

Readers of the very first issue of *The Case Former*, away back in 1991, may recall our well-beloved and Right Venerable G.C.C. Eduardo Tellerini wrote an article about a youthful experiment in the forced drying of cherry bombs in the oven. At least he *thought* he knew what he was doing... whereas Chief Williams appeared not to have exerted any thought at all.

History repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.

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## POLITICALLY INCORRECT FIREWORKS — WESTERN STYLE

The decision to hold the 1998 P.G.I. convention in Gillette, Wyoming causes mixed feelings in this author and he offers no predictions as to whether it will turn out well or not. On the plus side, it is rather close to home, there is plenty of room, and there are fewer safety-fakers than in most other places we know. But there are drawbacks, too, in this bleak part of the state where August temperatures are commonly in the nineties. What would be called "wind" in Iowa or Michigan is barely a breeze on the sagebrush flats, and while summer is not the peak season, real wind can hit anytime. Gillette is not a big city with thousands of hotel rooms, and if there is a very large attendance some people will be driving seventy miles or more *each way*. With all these things to consider, we fear that one special cracker pack design will not be enough to commemorate the event. Drawing inspiration from the work of Paolo da Giro, we propose the following:

1) *Football and Cheap Booze Brand* celebrates the cultural atmosphere of the state. These crackers are just common and noisy, but the paper is specially treated to leave a lingering aroma of stale beer. Ten percent of the proceeds go to the state university, and the crackers are finished in nauseating yellow and brown, the school colors.

2) *East Coast Thinkin' Brand* and *California Dreamin' Brand* are remarkably similar and might be made by

the same people. Both are finished in pale pink paper which is imprinted with tiny leftist slogans such as "Support Gay Rights" and "Ban Mountain Lion Hunting". Imported to the state in large quantities, they are especially popular among schoolteachers and elected officials.

3) *Dude Ranch Disaster Brand* conforms to Class "C" rules, but the crackers have extra long fuses and are weighted with sand to make it easier to toss them under passing horses. The label advocates responsible use, which means that any loud or pushy tourist under seventy is fair game.

4) *Drunken Indian Brand* is self-explanatory. It is only fair to mention that the abuse of *cheap* booze mentioned above does not always apply here. In an alley in Lander, which borders a reservation and is known for its wild weekends, the author once found an empty bottle labeled 12-year-old Dalmore! In keeping with another well-earned stereotype, this brand is a long way from Class "C".

5) *Gender-Bender Brand* is more "politically correct" than "incorrect", but is a must in the state which first established women's suffrage. Historians still debate the reasons behind this experiment, but it was partly due to laws requiring a certain number of *voters* (not just residents) for statehood, and it was also meant to attract more young women to this remote territory. In those more innocent times many people argued that the character of politics could be improved by including ladies, who would also have a civilizing influence on rowdy cowboys and miners. The men still behave as badly as ever, while the women now hang out in bars and use profanity.

The cutting edge of this social revolution is celebrated in these special children's packs. The "His" label features a small boy with a sparkler practicing his dance routine, while "Hers" has a girl in an army helmet blowing up anthills. Contents are unisex, the crackers being assorted denim blue and military camouflage. Children who save a hundred pack labels may redeem them for an earring or a pair of pink sweat pants.

6) *Pasture Poodle Poison Puffers* look like ordinary colored smoke balls. With toxic baits outlawed on public lands, and the "dogs" increasingly wary about shooting, it can be difficult to control their spread. Just the thing to keep the kiddies occupied, available in thallium green, ten-eighty tan, strychnine white, arsenical yellow, and mercury-vapor grey.

The wide open spaces allow plenty of rockets:

1) *Dances with Wolves* is made especially for Yellowstone Park, in honor of the federal reintroduction program. A high-pitched whistle is followed by a sharp report which simulates rifle fire. If these don't scare the wolves, they may at least disperse the bighorn sheep before the wolves get all the lambs.

2) *Goose Buster*. Wyoming has a great variety of wildlife, but the barren landscape and hordes of out-of-state hunters keep the game nervous. This Class "B" rocket is tipped with an ounce charge of nitro-



mannite surrounded by half a pound of number 2 shot, and offers one means of bagging the high ones. 3) *Jackalope JATO Units* can help in climbing steep mountains, or in outrunning the highway patrol long enough to turn off the road and hide.

4) *Purification by Fire* is a Chinese rocket with a long delay and a heavy heading of zirconium streamers. These should start enough grassfires to take out some of the sagebrush, and with any luck a few trailer courts and some of the tackier roadside tourist traps. 5) *Wind Warrior* rockets feature an end-burning design, giving a steady thrust for a relatively long time. They have no heading and are equipped with soft rubber nose cones. When launched properly these will struggle feebly upwind, almost parallel to the ground, until *brennschluss*. Then the object of the game is to catch them as they blow back. To allow for different countries and seasons, they should be made in 60, 80 and 100 m.p.h. strengths.



## THE PATTERSONSONG OF THE SHYSTER AND THE EXPERT

from THE KOSANKO, Act I, Sc. 3

(Air: "Vilana, che sa tu far")

*Shyster:* Expert, what know you how to do?

*Expert:* I know how to bend what's true,  
To tailor what I write and say  
To fit the whim of him who'll pay  
My fee so full and ample.

*Shyster:* Give me a sample.

*Expert:* Big bombs go high and farther drift,  
Than little ones without much lift.  
Problem's worse if there's a breeze -  
Now pay my thousand dollars please.

*Chorus:* *Posta, posta pur tantara, de pur susso*  
*Alza la gamba. Exaudi nos.*  
*Kyrie eleison.*

## SATURDAY AT THE WESTERN WINTER BLAST

(Air: "If any wench Venus' girdle wear," *The Beggar's Opera*)

Cold and raw Lake Hav-a-su was, At the winter fireworks party,  
The sun at its height was completely obscur'd, And by night it was raining right smartly: As  
I was a-stepping outside of Shugrue's, I tripped in a brimming-full gutter; The  
fireworks there were as wet as I was, and the best they could do was just sputter.

Cold and raw Lake Havasu was,  
At the winter fireworks party,  
The sun at its height was completely obscur'd,  
And by night it was raining right smartly:

As I was a-stepping outside of Shugrue's,  
I tripped in a brimming-full gutter;  
The fireworks there were as wet as I was,  
and the best they could do was just sputter.

To whom it may concern: If any of the writing contained herein should allude to any similarities regarding your personality, lifestyle, or mannerisms, and should they offend thee in any possible way...chances are you picked up the wrong piece of pyrotechnic literature. The Case-Former is built upon parodies, goofs, and ingenuity in writing. Naturally, if any of these blasts pertain to you - you really need not continue.

The Case Former is a byproduct of the I.:O.:O.:J.:., a non-profit, non-existent, non-nothin'! organization. Some say it is the National Lampoon of pyrotechny, and the Mad magazine of the pyrotechnic underground.\*

With this in mind I regard it as my privilege to present...

## NEWS FROM THE *Grapevine*

An ongoing department spinning tales of deceit, debauchery, devious deeds, double dealing, and doings in our pyrotechnic midst. We join our author in mid-thought as he touches on some touchy subjects that have touched us here, in the Grapevine.

Well now, let's see... whom could we roast this issue? There's always Krookshantee and Wheeze. I don't think an issue of the Case-Former would be in order without devoting a few blasts to these master con-artists. It's almost a tradition! Hmmm...who's been a bad boy since last issue?

Oh. There are the two prime examples of what living on the left coast will produce, who we'll get to later, but first I'll address a couple of hemorrhoids we have out here in the Empire State. New York's own Mayor Ghoulani imposed a task force headed by Al "the Pig" Pignatano. This group of "piss on your parade" police made life in the pyrotechnically plentiful East Coast absolutely unnerving, tapping phones, stalking people, pinching everything that moved! By mid-June last year I myself was ready for Prozac. These people should die from slow asshole cancer on public access television. Over 288 people were arrested in New York City alone. That was on last July 4th - with no relief in sight this year!

### 👉 Cheers & Jeers 👉

👉 Cheers to Don Rowe and the Ohio Hot Shots for their incredible contribution to the Muskegon convention in 1996 - their product input is always a welcomed and highly anticipated attraction. Likewise we recall Rozzi's demo at the 1995 convention in Stevens Point. It's great to know there is still good American product available to captivate an audience even when it is mostly comprised of pyro groupies who think Chinese shells are the end. We look forward to the Rozzi public display at this year's PGI Convention!

👉 Jeers to R\*\* D\*\*\*\* for making a complete pompous ass of himself, joining the ranks of such current P.A.'s

\* This is a profound disappointment to its editors, who firmly believed they were writing in the style of Varro's *Satyræ Menippeæ* and the character sketches of La Bruyère.

as Blombo, Krookshantee, and the Weasel himself. Where else but a Western Weeniethon would you find such a bloated scoundrel? Picking a fight with one of our own Rocket Men is not a nice way to make friends. We were surprised that his target bothered to come back this year. R.D., maybe you should look to your San Diego neighbors who lately left the planet for Comet Hale-Bopp... Then there's Wob Peever and his Snot Sheet...

👉 Cheers to Ken Nixon for again providing his electrical/computer expertise at various functions. His work speaks for itself and is second to none. He is one of a few good people to come out of California and we appreciate his continued support of pyrotechnic artistry.

### Grapevine Brain Teaser

There's been much upset amongst the net-wits recently that they can't legally continue to expropriate the name or initials of the Pyrotechnics Guild International without permission. Let's help them find a new name. Take one word from column "A", one from column "B", and a third from column "C":

| A              | B              | C              |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Patronizing    | Gadabouts      | Incorporated   |
| Pathological   | Gadflies       | Imbeciles      |
| Pompous        | Gaffes         | Inbreeders     |
| Passé          | Gallivanter    | Ideologues     |
| Packaged       | Gamey-smelling | Idiots         |
| Padded         | Ganglings      | Ignominics     |
| Paganizing     | Gapers         | Ignoramuses    |
| Palaverous     | Gargoyles      | Imitators      |
| Pathetic       | Gatecrashers   | Indecencies    |
| Propagandizing | Groupies       | Insupportables |
| Phony          | Grubbers       | Investivists   |

### Q & A regarding Convention Food

- Q: What's that on your plate?  
A: Well, it's either a piece of chicken or a well basted loafer.
- Q: What's that mark on the side of your drumstick?  
A: It looks like the spot where the farmer kicked it.
- Q: Was that iced tea?  
A: It smelled like cesspool extract.
- Q: Can you make a sentence with the word isthmus in it?  
A: Isthmus be one tough chicken!
- Q: How many forks did you break?  
A: I lost track after four.

These questions were overheard from various conversations at the past few PGI Banquets. No, I wasn't eavesdropping... it was just hard not to pick up on these comments due to the fact that we were eating in a commercial barn/warehouse stacked on top of each other like four cellblocks.

Of course the talk last year was about the concession stand at the shoot site, where every meal came with a free case of dyspepsia.

— MIGALUCC



# Lyra Pyroburslesca

*Big bombs, small bombs, great guns and little ones!  
Put him in a pillory!  
Rack him with artillery!*

— W.S. GILBERT, *The Grand Duke*

*Tragicomædia Musico-Pyrobolica:*

## THE FINAL SCENE OF "THE KOSANKO" or DEUS (& DIABOLUS) EX MACHINA.

After the fervent prayer of the fireworks men for the abatement of their persecution in the previous scene – there is a sudden effulgence of vari-colored tableau fires; and, to sweet instrumental music, SAINT BARBARA, patroness of pyrotechnists, accompanied by angels, descends to the stage surrounded by the implements of her martyrdom – stacks of ATF, DOT, and NFPA regulations. On her head is a golden crown, the points of which are shaped like skyrocket headings, and she is draped with a sash of Chinese crackers over her dark blue robe set with gold stars. She sings (*soprano aria*) to a heartfelt, hymnlike melody:

SAINT                Fireworks  
BARBARA:        make bright the night;  
                      Illuminate  
                      us by their light  
                      Our souls exalt,  
                      our hearts incite  
                      To joyful  
                      celebration.  
  
                      Safety quacks  
                      impose their might  
                      To spoil our fun,  
                      and vent their spite.  
                      We must confront  
                      their schemes and fight  
                      To stop their  
                      regulation.  
  
                      Here's a Wheeze  
                      that's mighty slight;  
                      His publication  
                      fly-by-night;  
                      Subscribers this  
                      did not delight –  
                      Condemn'd his  
                      reputation.  
  
                      Whitewater  
                      barrators in sight,  
                      Themselves with sham  
                      degrees bedight,  
                      The devil take  
                      this lot tonight,  
                      To just  
                      incineration!

Lycopodium pipes and stage fog. Flash pots announce the arrival of MALACODA, a senior demon attired as a 13th century *podesta*, and his retinue of 12 imps, clad as tipstuffs. They bear pitchforks, grappling hooks, and buckets of boiling tar. MALACODA is clearly flustered and announces (*recitativo secco*):

MALACODA:    Who the Hell called us,  
                      And why have they hauled us,  
                      Away from our comfy old *bolgia*?  
                      We're the Eighth Circle's best,  
                      We give sinners no rest,  
                      Anybody in Hell could ha' told ya.  
                      Barbariccia, call the roll!

BARBARICCIA, clad as a sergeant, emits a loud flatulence<sup>1</sup>. The IMPS, who have previously been engaging in Three Stooges slapstick, recognize this as a call to order and fall in line. As the name of each is read, he sticks out his tongue in salute.

BARBARICCIA:   Alichino!  
                      Cagnazzo!  
                      Calcabrina!  
                      Draghinazzo!  
                      Farfarello!  
                      Graffiacane!  
                      Libicocco!  
                      Malebranche!  
                      Rubicante!  
                      Scarmiglione!  
                      All present and accounted for, Most  
                      Abysmal!

MALACODA turns, and seeing SAINT BARBARA, backs off together with IMPS. Though an adversary of Heaven, he must pay proper respect. (*Recit.*)

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Inf.*, XXI *ad fin.*,

Ma prima avea ciascun la lingua stretta  
Coi denti, verso lorduca, per cenno;  
Ed elli avea del cul fatto trombetta.

Also Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 165: "σαλπιγξ ὁ πρωκτὸς ἐστίν."

MALACODA: Scusa, signora.  
 – Ma le diavole gentiluomini  
 Nel lengua dantesca proclame le  
 loro fulmini.

(*Bass aria*, to great fanfare)

Tuonerà tra mille turbini  
 la mia destra potentissima  
 con sentenza rigidissima  
 scaglierà saetta, e fulmini.  
 Di cieco carcere  
 nel sen profondo  
 al rai del mondo  
 si celi il misero!  
 E se mai risero  
 le sue follie  
 or dalle mie  
 ire vendicatrici impari a piangere!

(*Recit.*, pointing his muckfork at THE  
 KOSANKO and his toady, WHEEZE)

Ogn'uom v'è barratier<sup>2</sup>,  
 come li consiglieri di Sta. Zita,  
 Del "no," per li denar,  
 vi si fa "ita."

IMPS seize and bind the culprits in chains and douse them with  
 boiling tar. In the ensuing pandemonium, more Three Stooges  
 slapstick follows with the recitative dialogue:

SCARMIGLIONE: O Malacoda, vuo che 'l tocchi  
 (waves fork in sul groppone?  
 at KOSANKO)

MALACODA: Si, fa che lil' accochi!

GRAFFIACANE, O Rubicante, fa che tu li metti  
 LIBICOCCO *et al.*: Li unghione a dosso si che tu lo  
 (pointing to scuoi!  
 WHEEZE)

KOSANKO No!  
 AND WHEEZE: Oh woe!  
 Please don't take us below!  
 What will it take?  
 Your while we'll make  
 It worth, we swear it's so!  
 May  
 Today  
 We souls to you betray?  
 We'll make a deal  
 On pyros squeal  
 If you'll just let us stay!

*Excuse me, ma'am.*

– But all demons polite,  
 In Dantesque fashion their fulminations  
 indite.

*I shall thunder, amidst a thousand-fold whirlwind  
 My right hand most powerful I rear,  
 With frightful judgment most severe,  
 To throw lightning and thunder at those who've  
 sinned.  
 In the nethermost pit, you'll be assured  
 Far from the light of the world  
 The miserable caitiff shall be hurled  
 Into an oubliette, and there immured.  
 And if at his follies, whate'er the reason why,  
 He once laughed, than shall I by  
 My avenging wrath, give him good cause to cry!*

*Like Lucca's aldermen,  
 these are barrators,  
 I say: Their "nay," for cash,  
 becomes a "yea."*

*Hey, Malacoda, do you want me to stick  
 This one in his fat arse?*

*Yes, and make it hurt – you know the trick!*

*Rubicante, in this one's backside  
 Now sink your claws, and flay his sorry hide!*

*Continued on page 20*

<sup>2</sup>The proper place in Hell for "expert witnesses" is the Fifth Bolgia of the Eighth Circle, where the "barrators" or profiteers from litigation, who for pay give agreeable testimony, are. They could also go, further down, with the "false witnesses" but for Dante's use of the precise term:

A quella terra ch'i ho ben fornita  
 Ogn'uom v'e barratier, fuor che Bonturo,  
 Del "no," per li denar, vi si fa "ita." (*Inf.* XXI, 40-42)

Their punishment is to be drowned in boiling pitch and when they stick their heads up above it, to be held down with pitchforks and bale hooks, "like meat being boiled." *Consiglieri di Santa Zita* refers to the aldermen of Lucca, almost as notoriously corrupt a bunch as those of Chicago.

IMPS chorus: S'abruca lo cattivo! S'arroste!  
 (with full Fra le dure catene  
 orchestra) del temerario ardir paghi le pene!

*The caitiff toast! Then let him roast!  
 And in the heaviest chains  
 For his impudence let him bear the pains!*

MALACODA and IMPS dance around their prisoners, rapping their pitchfork handles on the stage to the rhythm of a barbaric melody.

KOSANKO, So now we're going to Hell  
 WHEEZE: Say, wouldn't it be swell  
 (duet in echo) If you went there as well?  
 Damn you all!

*Exeunt* MALACODA, IMPS, KOSANKO, WHEEZE, downward. There is a distinct smell of brimstone.

SAINT (Recit.)  
 BARBARA: Parlan ancor li angeli e sante  
 Nelle parole del divin' poeta Dante.  
 (sop. aria)  
 Deh, mi dite,  
 se gioite  
 dentro l'alma al par di me?  
 Anco in Ciel le stelle tremule  
 vezzosette ogn'ora danzano  
 ma per questo non avanzano  
 il mio cor, di cui son' emule.

*Likewise above, from humble cherub to Virgin Mary,  
 Do we speak in the verse of Alighieri.*

*Pray, tell me, does your soul with common voice,  
 Join mine, and in this result rejoice?*

*The twinkling stars in Heaven dance  
 Most charmingly in its vast expanse  
 But not so much so as does my heart  
 At this deliverance of pyrotechny's art.*

SAINT BARBARA, PYROTECHNISTS, AND  
 ANGEL'S CHORUS:

Thus happy and free  
 We fugeys should be  
 Our rockets and bombshells to fire;  
 We do know enough  
 That thus off the cuff  
 We can do it sans consequence dire.

*Chorus:* Thus happy and free  
*I fugisti* should be  
 Their rockets and bombshells to fire;  
 They do know their stuff  
 And that's quite enough;  
 Pay no heed to the safety-fake liar.

Without quackish contrivance  
 or plastic appliance  
 let us shoot as we always have done;

Our knowledge is free  
 from sham doctor's degree<sup>3</sup>  
 let us just do our work and have fun.

*Chorus:* Without quackish contrivance  
 or Kosanko's connivance  
 let them shoot as they always have done

Their knowledge them frees  
 from the thrall of the Wheeze;  
 Now we can all have some fun!

*Exeunt* SAINT BARBARA and ANGELS (upwards, amidst stage mines and shells, of virginal silvery-white);  
*Exeunt* PYROTECHNISTS (stage left or right, amidst rejoicing).

CURTAIN

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Varro, *Sat. Menipp.*: "Philosophastris licentiantur in artibus, artem qui non habent."

(CONTINUED from inside front cover)

and goes out of its way personally to belittle (unlike the Flipper we don't split our infinitives) those people and their positions. An officer of the P.G.I., seeking opportunity to rebut accusations made (among others) against him, was curtly denied, told that access to the list was by approval, and he was not approved. All of this is carried on under the cover of a public web site that contains noble-sounding expressions about the free interchange of ideas! Hypocrisy is indeed the tribute vice pays to virtue.

Well do we recall when the practices of mass mailings containing character assassinations and political pot-stirring began in the Guild. It was in 1990 that "The Friends of the P.G.I." first made their appearance, and in a sort of response that our Order was founded; not as a political counterpoise, but as a sort of comfortable exile to which the creative and accomplished in pyrotechnic craftsmanship, and those sympathetic to them, might flee to enjoy each other's fellowship, in the event our beloved Guild should fall to these self-serving schemers.

Far be it from us to lecture our Companions, or belabor what they already well know about our Order and its purposes. These were stated long ago, by our Right Venerable Companion Bianco Gasolini, in Vol. I, No. 1 of the *Case Former*, back in 1991. His article, "Fama et Confessio Fraternitatis," was deliberately so entitled to allude to another famous fraternity, which its founders called a "ludibrium," "jocus severus," and "lusus serius" – namely, a game, a severe jest, and serious playfulness.

If The Flipper wants to set himself up as the John Birch Society attacking the imagined conspiracies of the Bavarian Illuminati, the Trilateral Commission, or the Bilderbergers; or the Rev'd. Pat Robertson attacking the poor suffering Freemasons, he is welcome to cast himself in such a rôle. We happily accept the position of his target. He is placing himself in enviable company. The whole situation reminds us of the wisdom of Umberto Eco:

"This is parody's mission: it must never be afraid of going too far. If its aim is true, it simply heralds what others will later produce, unblushing, with impassive and assertive gravity."\*

Companions – be assured. Our Order will continue to conduct its Manifestations and we shall continue to enjoy our fraternal conviviality, unspoilt by the presence of the unclubbable. Further, the *Case Former* will not make any political endorsements for

P.G.I. office. It never has done so, and there is no intention to change. Most of the people running for P.G.I. office are our friends, and those we don't know as such have done nothing to offend us. We do have some concerns about the expectations of certain supporters of some candidates, but no candidate has himself given us much cause for concern.

We shall continue to celebrate the accomplishments of the creative, the learned, and the fraternal. At the same time we do not intend to spare the ongoing targets of our satire:

- Pretentious humbugs who suppose their cow-college credentials entitle them to precedence over people whose practical competence in pyrotechny has been obtained by long experience, and is on display in the sky for everyone to see;
- Unfraternal people who would betray the trust of their fellows and engage in meretricious legal activity against the firework trade;
- Petty martinets who compensate for the insignificant tedium of their workaday lives by coming to a fireworks convention, and there obtaining a position of minor authority, in which they proceed to gratify their pitiful egos by trampling, jackbooted, upon the pleasure of those who are their superiors in intellect, artistry, and breeding;
- Entrepreneurs who scheme to convert the function of a voluntary and non-profit organization, which should be held in the highest stewardship, to their private aggrandizement and enrichment – think of those who have been responsible for past P.G.I. conventions that lost money, if you want to know what we mean;
- Frauds, charlatans, the bogus and the empty;
- The humorless, malicious, and the joyless.

We won't name names. If the dunce cap or the jackboots fit, wear them!

Great is the truth, and it shall prevail; and when it does, that light, which is truth, will banish the o'ershadowing gloom, and bring to naught the clandestine power of the hypocrite; that strength, which is truth, will elevate what is wise, and beautiful, to its wonted place; and all will be well. Then will our labors have achieved their fruit, and perhaps then, we shall lay down our pen.

Your affectionate and fraternal servitor,  
— PASQUINO

\* *Misreadings*, trans. by William Weaver, 1993: Harcourt Brace & Co.

## MORE SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

*News Notes From All Around*

### ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES FROM WHEEZANISTAN

(cf. *Case-Former*, Vol. III, No. 3, p. 24)

Observers of the local fauna have been distressed to discover the recrudescence of a species everyone hoped was extinct. The jumping jackbooted judi-bird is, apparently, back with a vengeance. The female of the species, more easily spotted, is known for her raucous cries and her practice of upsetting the habitat, and maliciously destroying the peace and quiet of other species. The male, dull-colored by contrast, and more elusive, makes his presence known mainly by his loathesome and joyless croak.

Both sexes prefer a diet of carrion when available, but when this is lacking, make do with seeds and other morsels extracted from various droppings they find on the forest floor. The presence of these birds may readily be detected by their baleful and dolorous calls, and by the mess they ordinarily leave behind.

The species is thought to live in an odd symbiosis with the bloated shitepoke and the cheeky bustard, a belief recent observations tend to confirm.

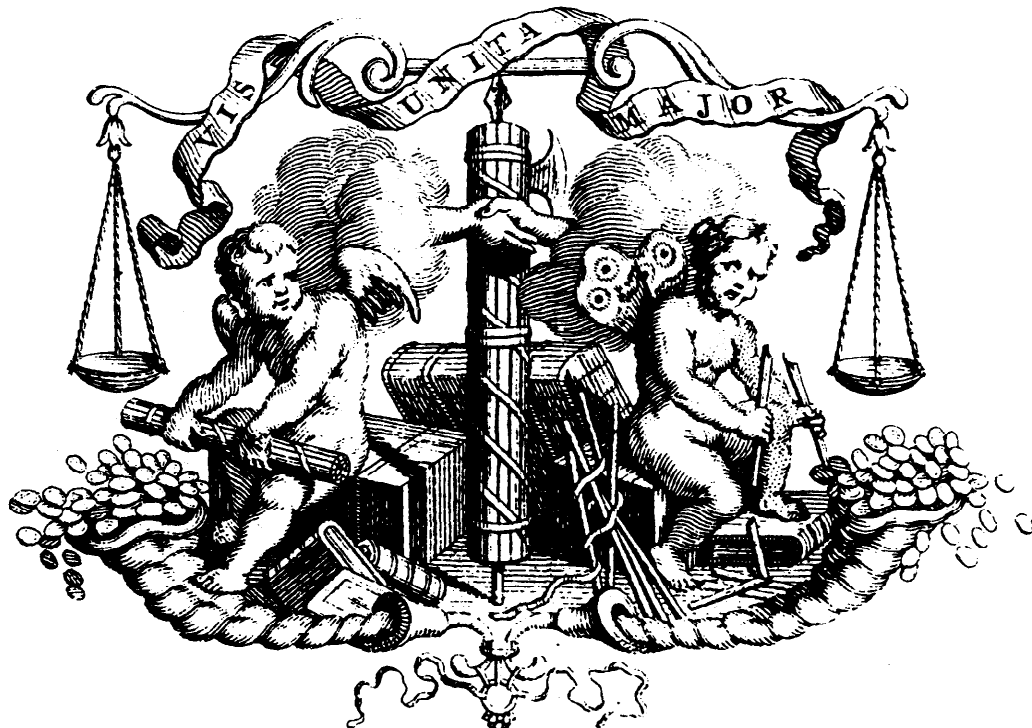
Officials of the Urpee Seed Company of Liberal, Kansas, announced that they are introducing a new

plant, the spiny tomato. Known as the "Ravin' B," this variety is early-growing and bears abundant sour fruit. Of indeterminate sex, the plant shows the kinship of *Solanum lycopersicum* to *Datura stramonium* by the vicious thorns on its berries, though company spokesmen deny that it is even mildly hallucinogenic, and assert that it is just a garden-variety vegetable.

In a recent issue of the journal *Epidemiology*, French researcher Serge Renaud reported he has found a 30% lower than expected risk of death in men who drank two or three glasses of wine a day. In the interest of the health and well-being of our Companions, the *Case-Former* is pleased to take advantage of Prof. Renaud's work by publishing, in consultation with the distinguished Chirurgeon-General of our Order, the following recommendation from Matt of the Mint:

*Fill ev'ry glass,  
For wine inspires us,  
and fires us  
with Courage,  
Love and Joy!*

Complete scores of *THE KOSANKO*, with all melodies and thorough-bass realized in the most fashionable mode, may be had of P. Attainant & Cie., Paris; Tallis, Byrd & Co., Ltd., London; J. T. de Bry GmbH of Oppenheim, and many other reputable music publishers, upon application.



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